This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

600072085S

THE

MORALS OF MAY FAIR.

A NOVEL.

"Der Wahn ist kurz, die Reu' ist lang."
SCHILLER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1858.

249. x. 150.

CHARLES BEVAN AND SON, PRINTERS, CHAPEL STREET, GROSVENOR SQUARE.

THE MORALS OF MAY FAIR.

CHAPTER I.

THE winter and spring passed by; and Marguerite became at least accustomed to her life. Mrs. Danby and her daughter both disliked her in their own way, and strove to make her home as miserable as possible, in the hope of forcing her to go out as a governess; but Danby loved his little cousin, and in the absence of his step-daughter at her gaieties, or of his wife during her fancied illnesses, Marguerite was his only companion.

She liked him, and was grateful; but, as she had told Earnscliffe, hers was not a nature readily to take to strangers; and even

had any of her new associates been more refined or congenial than they were, she would have been long in becoming attached to them.

As it was, Georgy, whose nearer approach to her own age naturally attracted Marguerite the most, continually jarred upon her. Sometimes—if Miss De Burgh wanted an opinion on her dress, or to be helped in a song—she would put on a very sweet manner, and Marguerite just thought she was going to like her, when a look, an allusion, from Georgy, repelled her in a way she could not have explained, and made her steal timidly away to her own room. In spite of her dress and manner, and profuse mention of great names—or rather, consequently upon all this—Marguerite felt that Georgy's soul was vulgar and petty, from the first day she knew her. She saw her affectation—the acting of her life—how her whole mind was centred upon money and distinction, and trying to know people who did not wish to know her, and the hope of marrying somebody or anybody. And instinctively she shrank from it all.

But Mrs. Danby repulsed her even more.

The inanition, the selfishness of this woman's life was something so new to Marguerite, after the gentle uncomplaining sufferings of her own father, that she could scarcely even assume a tone of sincerity in enquiring after her fancied complaints, and in time, rarely entered the drawing room where Mrs. Danby passed her time between her tawdry morning callers, and homœopathic doctors.

When the weather was fine, Danby took her long walks about London to show her the sights, with most of which she was very disappointed. The Exchange, and the Tower, and the Bank, seen ankle-deep in mud, and through chocolate fogs, were so unlike the London, that Philip had described, and she imagined! And Danby was often quite surprised at her very mild enthusiasm.

"Is this the best part of London that we have seen, cousin? is there nothing more?" asked Marguerite, one February afternoon, when Danby had shown her Regent Street, and Piccadilly, and Trafalgar Square, and they were walking home very tired in the dusk.

"Nothing more? Why child, what would you have? I thought, after passing all your

life in a ruined old French house in Brittany, anything would appear grand."

"Ah! that was home. But then I imagined London so different to what it is. My own childish fancy misled me, I suppose."

"I am afraid you are not happy in yourself, dear, and therefore nothing appears bright."

"Oh! I am happy with you, cousin. Our evenings are very pleasant together in your own room, when the others are out, and poor Bello may lie before the fire. It was very kind of you to let me keep him, and to tell me nothing of your own antipathy to dogs. I should be *very* miserable without Bello!"

"Um—the dog is old."

"Yes, I sometimes think he will not live very long; the air is so different for him here; and then living down in the area, you see, instead of wandering where he likes—"

"Well, my dear, you know that I have tried to have him more up-stairs; but ——"

"Yes, cousin, you have been very kind in that, as in everything else. You always try to take my part; and, as the others do not like me, I am sure my presence does not make you any happier in your own house. It would

be far better for me to go out as a governess, Miss Georgy says; and, perhaps, she is right. But, then, I do not like to leave Bello. Do you think I might take him with me if I was a governess, cousin?"

The childish gravity with which she asked the question, made Danby smile; but it quickly faded from his face, and he replied—

"Marguerite, you would not speak of becoming a governess if you knew how deeply it wounds my feelings to hear you. As I have told you, it was through me that your father became poor; and while I have a home you shall never leave it. Besides this, you are in no dependant position. When Kersaint is sold, and the money it realizes invested, you will have a nice little income of your own —enough, on my death, with what I shall leave you, to live very comfortably. If you never marry, little Maggy! You are not quite an old maid yet, you know."

"I shall be soon seventeen, sir. How time goes on! It seems only yesterday that I was a child."

"And, pray, what do you consider yourself now?"

"Well, Miss Georgy says that I look two-and-twenty, and have such an old manner!"

"Does she? It struck me Georgy looked very glum the other evening at their grand *réunion*, as they call it, when you, in your black frock and the flower I gave you, attracted so much attention from all her friends."

"I wished afterwards I had not appeared," replied Marguerite. "I never will again, but Mrs. Danby told me to do so, and said my singing would make the party 'go off.'"

"Georgy's quondam admirer, that long-coated young parson, seemed to have a good deal to say to you, Maggy."

"Mr. Ignatius Shirley? Oh, cousin, he told me I was a true Anglican! I had no idea of it before. And then, when I was describing our cathedral at home, he stared so in my face, and repeated some half-sacred lines, that yet seemed to apply to me. I could not understand him."

"Nor could Georgy either, I take it. She told me, next morning, you were a thorough flirt, Maggy!"

Marguerite coloured. "Georgy does not like me," she said, "and calls me by that

odious name, because I dislike it so much. We shall have a nice evening alone to-day, however. They are both going to the theatre."

"Not quite alone, dear. I asked Mortimer this morning."

"Oh! Mr. Mortimer does not disturb us. You and he can talk and play chess after dinner, while I sing my old songs to myself. He never minds my singing, he is so good-natured. I really like Mr. Mortimer!"

They reached home, and found the ladies ready dressed in the drawing-room; for they had dined early, as they usually did when they went to the theatre. Marguerite's face was all glowing with health and freshness, as she entered; and, in spite of her dingy mourning, its exceeding beauty made Miss Georgy feel spiteful.

"How fond you are of the London streets after dark, Marguerite! I wonder at your taste, for a young lady so pastorally brought up!"

"We have seen so much to-day, I never thought of being out late—otherwise I dislike walking on these dark, foggy afternoons."

"Oh! of course. Mamma, why has she

left off her veil and turned her hair back from her face? A young woman of her age should not be dressed so childishly—it looks quite ridiculous."

"It is very immaterial how Miss St. John dresses," drawled Mrs. Danby.

"I don't agree with you! People see Marguerite going in and out of our house, and naturally look upon her as belonging to *us*."

"Perhaps that was the reason your young parson admired her so much," said Danby, "for he used to be very fond of you, Georgy."

"Admire her, indeed!" echoed Miss De Burgh. "I do not call *that*, admiration. Any girl with a sort of look and manner, can get young men to talk to her."

"I think it highly wrong," said Mrs. Danby, languidly, "to put such ludicrous ideas into Miss St. John's head. Her future position will be one, in which no respectable young woman ever allows herself to be addressed by the other sex—unless indeed some male dependant of the family should make her an offer of marriage. I remember my dear delightful friend, Lady Louisa Drysdale, used to say it was charming when the governess and butler

were engaged. 'It makes them cheerful,' she said, 'and prevents them running after my sons.'"

"Lady Drysdale be ——," interrupted Danby, aroused out of his usual placidity. "What has all this cursed trash of butlers and governesses to do with Marguerite? If anyone turns out of my house, it won't be her, ma'am—you may be very sure. Come here to me, Maggy darling!"

But Marguerite had become suddenly pale, though she never spoke a word. She walked straight to the door, then up to her own room.

"*Can* I bear it?" she exclaimed, passionately, when she was alone. "Can I live with these people any longer? Oh! I will be a governess—anything sooner than remain with them. A governess—classed with servants! I was not made for it. Father, if you could see me now!"

She did not weep. She never wept after an insult from these women; but her cheeks burnt, and her heart beat painfully, and she paced up and down her small room impatiently, until she heard the house door close after them. Then she bathed her face,

smoothed back the dark masses of hair from her temples, and came down slowly and wearily to the drawing-room.

A figure stood alone in the uncertain light before the fire, and, thinking it was Danby, Marguerite approached softly, and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Cousin, it *is* hard to bear all they say to me."

"All who say, Miss St. John?"

"Oh, Mr. Mortimer, forgive me! I mistook you for my cousin."

"What is it so hard to bear?"

"Nothing. I mean nothing that I can tell you, sir."

She seated herself by the fire, and strove hard not to cry, while Mortimer stood silently looking down at her averted face. He had looked very hard at Marguerite of late.

"You are left a good deal alone," he went on.

"Yes, I like that. Mr. Danby and I are quite happy together."

"Do you never wish to accompany Miss De Burgh to her gaieties, then?"

"Oh, never!" Marguerite glanced at her

black dress. "I would not go to any gay place."

"Not now, of course. But afterwards I suppose you will go out with them?"

"Never. In the first place"—Marguerite grew bolder at his kind tone—"I don't think I should ever like the same places or people as Georgy does; in the next, I am going to be a governess. Although my cousin does not much like it, I have quite made up my mind—"

"You—are—going—to be—a governess, —Miss St. John?" exclaimed Mortimer, laying an emphasis on each word of the question.

"Yes—they often tell me it would be best, and I feel it so now. I hope the children will not dislike me—and that I may take Bello," she added, in a tearful whisper.

Mr. Mortimer gave a kind of sound, between an indignant exclamation and a chuckle. An odd sound it was, that made Marguerite look up at him with her clear steady gaze, and wonder what he was thinking about.

"Miss Georgy has recommended this plan I suppose?"

"Yes—and Mrs. Danby, too. They find

me so useless here, and they say my French accent will make it easy for me to get a good situation. The only thing I doubt about—is Bello. Do you think it likely a governess would be allowed to keep a dog?"

Mortimer's reply was prevented by the entrance of Danby, who came up and kissed Marguerite kindly—then joked her upon flirting with Mortimer in the dark.

"I shall tell Georgy," he said. "You must know, Maggy, that Mortimer is an old admirer of hers."

"Am I?" returned Mortimer. "Yes—I admired the whole lot at Boulogne, didn't I? and I admire them more this evening than I ever have before, even—"

"Dinner is announced," broke in Marguerite quickly, afraid lest he should repeat her half-confidences. "Who will take me?"

She laid her little hand on Mortimer's arm, and they went down silently, Danby following. During dinner the two old men talked as usual, about their cronies, and the stocks, and a misty kind of politics of their own, while Marguerite—with Bello by her side, for a treat—paid very little attention to either of

them. She was still turning over the governess scheme in her head; and thinking that after all it might be very much better than her present life. "If I could be with nice people," she thought, "people something more like my father or Philip, who would be kind and not say the bitter things they do here, I might be happy; especially if the children cared for me. I wonder what Manon would say, if she knew I was to be a governess."

"Lord St. Leger is on the verge of ruin again, I am told," said Mortimer, in the middle of a small radical disquisition upon the aristocracy. The name roused Marguerite's attention in a second, she remembered that he was the father of Philip's wife. "I hear all about it from a friend of mine, who once had the folly to accept some of his bills. He has gambled away nearly the whole of his last inheritance, already."

"I remember the man well, years ago, in my younger days, when I used to go to the Derby and Goodwood," said Danby. "A sickly, cadaverous-looking fellow he was—and a professional gambler."

"Yes, he has been black-balled at half the

clubs in London; and can now only prey upon his fellow-sharks or young lads in the dens about St. James's Street."

"Has he any sons?" asked Danby.

"No—only one daughter; and she made a miserable marriage three or four years ago. She married Earnscliffe the writer, who, like all other geniuses, was a bad husband, and after two or three years' wretchedness they separated."

"What, legally?"

"Oh no! There was nothing of that kind. Mere incompatibility of temper. *You* know, Danby, the old story!"

"By-the-way, Maggy knows Philip Earnscliffe," said Danby, evading the question of domestic happiness.

"Indeed! Ah! talking of authors, do you remember—" and Mortimer began a very long story about somebody they had both known thirty years ago.

He had never looked at Marguerite—never seen the sudden flush, the paleness, the nervous clasp of her hands, at the mention of Earnscliffe's name—had he done so, her future life might have been a very different one.

For Mortimer would have married no woman, knowing that she had had a former lover. He was sensitive, almost to eccentricity, upon this point—indeed, a kind of jealousy of the unknown past, had been one great reason of his not having, hitherto, wished to marry.

They went on with their drowsy talk as before; but all Marguerite's thoughts were changed. With Earnscliffe's name came back old hopes, old dreams, old sunny plans for the future. Oh, compared with these, how blank and dreary seemed her prospects now! To be a governess, a dependent upon the will of strangers, and with no tie to life, no affections of her own!

Her head drooped, and her cheek grew so pale, that at last Danby noticed her; and, breaking off abruptly, he exclaimed—

"Maggy child! what ails you—are you ill?"

"No, cousin; I—I—am cold, I think."

"Come nearer the fire, then."

The dessert was now on the table, and they drew round to the fire—the two old men on either side, Marguerite in the centre.

"You must cheer up, my dear," went on

Danby, "and sing to us, presently, some of your French ballads."

"I could not sing to-night. I have a choking sensation in my throat. Cousin, do you not hear—I can scarcely speak?"

"Have you taken cold, child? Were we out too late for you?"

"No, it is not that; I am—oh, cousin!" (with a sudden outburst of tears) "I am *so* wretched!"

"Marguerite!"—it was so unlike her to complain before a stranger, that Danby knew her sorrow must be great—"my poor child, you shall tell me all this another time."

"Mr. Mortimer knows; Mr. Mortimer is very kind"—her voice grew thick—"I do not mind saying it before him."

"But what is this sudden sorrow? I know"—he spoke hastily—"what Mrs. Danby said to you this evening, and that your feelings were hurt—not more deeply than mine, perhaps—but that is nothing new. You have had to bear similar things a hundred times before."

"Cousin, you have always been so good, I grieve to leave you; and I think that is one of my deepest troubles to-night."

"Yes," broke in Mortimer, "I hear that you are going to lose Miss St. John, Danby."

"I have heard nothing of it."

"Dear cousin, you know what I said to you to-day. Well, I have quite made up my mind now. It will be far better for me to go out as a governess."

"You never shall, Marguerite."

"Cousin, if I wish it?"

"Never!"

"Oh, Mr. Mortimer! speak for me. It may be hard to be dependant and a governess; but it is worse—far worse—to live with relations who are unkind to me! I know that I am barely tolerated here, and that all my cousin's kindness makes him more miserable in his own home. Speak for me, sir; tell him that it would be far better!"

She flung back her curls with her old quick gesture, and, leaning forward, looked very full in Mortimer's face, her hands clasped with that slight foreign manner that was natural to her—her lips parted. Mortimer looked straight in the fire, and became very red. He cleared his throat once or twice, and fidgetted with his cravat, but nothing came.

"Speak for me, sir!" repeated Marguerite, in her rich, sonorous voice.

Mr. Mortimer rose, and walked to the fire; looked into it for a few minutes, then turned round, and grasped his coat-tails; and, supported and flanked, as it were, by this familiar position of fifty years' standing, he spoke—deliberately, but with unusual quickness for him, and a certain agitation of manner.

"Danby, I'm a plain man as you know. Miss St. John, I'm an old man as you see. I can't make fine speeches to either of you, but this I have to say: If, Miss St. John, you will—not forget my age, and my great unfitness to be your husband, but overlook it—and become my wife, you shall have settlements, a duke's daughter might be proud of, and all the devotion a plain old fellow like myself can offer."

Danby literally sprang from his chair in astonishment.

"Mortimer—are you in earnest?"

"I don't look much as if I was joking, do I?"

"After all you have said of marrying in one's old age, to offer yourself to Maggy!

Adopt her man! You can give her a happier home than mine, adopt her as your daughter. She's only sixteen—she's a child!"

"Thank you, Danby! I have made up my mind with respect to my own determination long ago; that is, long before to-night, though I never could bring it out. I only wish to hear what Miss St John says; how she takes the idea of having such a husband as me!"

He had never glanced at her yet, since he began to speak; and had kept his eyes fixed upon Danby, even while addressing Marguerite. But now he turned slightly and looked at her.

He expected to see her, at least, a little agitated. It is conventional to believe that young women are so, when receiving an offer of marriage, even from a man four times their own age. To see her blush—or tremble; perhaps shrink from him. But Marguerite did neither. She was watching him intently—watching the real emotion, the earnestness of his plain face, and feeling with delighted surprise that again one human being on the earth had conceived an affection for her.

Marriage—as she could never marry Philip

—was an abstract idea with Marguerite. Mortimer spoke of home, and kindness, things she had little of now; and all this was offered just at the very moment when her sad young heart was musing over the cold prospect of being a governess. What wonder how she decided? That Mortimer as her husband could rival Philip, that there could be falseness to *him* in marrying that plain, rough old man, were things as far from her thoughts as Mortimer's riches, and his settlements. The kindness, the home was all she thought of, and—poor child! accepted.

"Sir, you are very good. I little thought you cared so much for me. How can I thank you enough for your offer?" rising to his side and looking up at him.

"Maggy!"

"Miss St. John! am I indeed so happy?"

Her cool acceptance surprised them both. It was so unlike what either expected, and for a moment the same thought flashed across them:—"Can money so readily win even her fair young heart?" But one glance at her face—that face where all the sinless trust of childhood yet rested—undid the suspicion; and

then a sharp regret smote Danby as he thought Marguerite was promising—she knew not what, in her desire to leave his house.

"Oh, Maggy, I wish *I* could have made you happier."

"Dear cousin, you have done your best. It was the others who never liked me—"

"Miss St. John—Marguerite, will you indeed accept me?" said Mortimer, very gently, and bending over her.

"Yes, sir, if you will be troubled with me."

Mortimer stooped and kissed her forehead, "May God make you happy, child!" he said, solemnly.

CHAPTER II.

MORTIMER remained late, and they all sat talking round the fire. There was nothing very loverlike in the appearance of the group. The two old men still kept their places on either side, while Marguerite in the centre turned first to one then the other, with a bright cheerful smile upon her face.

Mortimer, whose manner had still the quiet agitation of some new-found happiness, although Marguerite did not perceive it, arranged everything as he thought would please her most; where he should take a new house —what carriages—what conservatories—what books—what pictures—she should have.

"And Bello!" added Marguerite, striking

the old hound, as he pressed close up by her side, "Poor Bello! You will not object to him, sir? and all the dear old books from home when they come?"

"Everything of yours, Miss St. John, will be of value to me."

He was quite unused to make pretty speeches, and did so very awkwardly; but Marguerite took the simple meaning of the words and felt that they were kind.

"Poor old Kersaint!" she went on, "I suppose it will be sold soon, or let."

"Well," said Danby, "I heard from the agent in Paris a few days ago, and he tells me there is great difficulty in finding a tenant for such an out-of-the-way place, and that it will be much better to sell. A neighbouring farmer has made a tolerable bid for it already, —he wants the land."

"And he will destroy the garden—perhaps pull down the Manoir itself," added Marguerite sadly.

"It must pain you to part with your old house. Does it not?" asked Mortimer.

"Yes, I cannot bear to think of it belonging to strangers. However it must be—"

"Not now. The old house shall be kept just as it is, in case you ever like to pay it a visit. It would be a pleasant summer excursion."

"You will keep Kersaint? Oh! Mr. Mortimer; and may Manon live there—and poor Bruno? Can it be really true that I shall see home again? Cousin, I am so happy!" springing to her feet, and clasping her hands in excitement.

"Poor little Maggy! You look brighter than I have ever seen you. I wonder what they will say!" added Danby, abruptly; *they* always meant his women-kind.

Mortimer chuckled a little. "It will be rather a surprise for Miss Georgy, I imagine, this failure of the governess scheme."

"I am sure Georgy will be glad," said Marguerite. "For, in the first place, she does not like my living here, and, in the next—"

"Well, Maggy; why do you hesitate?"

"Oh! Georgy has often said how eccentric it was of Mr. Mortimer not to marry. So of course she will be glad to see him married at last."

"Delighted, I have no doubt—and her 'mama' also!" said Mortimer, drily.

"I am very sure they will be delighted at my departure, if they are not at your marriage," cried Marguerite, laughing. "But they *will* be surprised! Only this evening Mrs. Danby spoke with such certainty of my being a governess.

"A governess!" echoed Mortimer, half aloud. "Such a glorious creature as that—a governess!"

Certainly Marguerite did not look much suited for one at that moment, as she stood before him in an attitude of the most child-like and unconscious grace—her face flushed, her bright curls falling in a perfect cloud about her shoulders.

"Surely you never thought of it in earnest?"

"Indeed I did; although my cousin was so good he never liked to hear of it. Perhaps I should have got on pretty well. I don't know. But, oh! Mr. Mortimer, I like my new prospects so much better. I feel as if I had a home again, now that Kersaint is not to be sold." And she turned her eyes to his with a soft warm expression that made Mortimer's heart thrill, as it had never done during his sixty years of hard life.

"Cousin Danby must come often—must he not, to see us?" *Us.* How sweet the monosyllable sounded from her lips! "Whenever you are left alone I shall hold you engaged to me, cousin—remember."

"I shall miss you terribly, Maggy. Nothing but the thought of your own increased happiness could reconcile me to your marrying so young. You seem such a child still—not seventeen, and—"

"Danby, don't begin about adopting again," interrupted Mortimer, quickly. "Chacung a song gout." Marguerite could not repress a smile at the wondrous French accent. "*You* have preferred marrying a lady of experience—it is my happiness to have won a girl of sixteen."

"And Heaven grant your choice may turn out the best, my friend! I am sure"—very meekly—"I ought not to offer advice on such subjects, with my own fate as an example of my judgment!"

A thundering double knock at the door, here made the quiet trio start, and Danby turn quite pale. "Who is to tell them?" he said, nervously. "We must decide at once."

"Not I," said Mortimer, evidently enjoying his friend's discomposure. "Of course, you are the proper person. You are Miss St. John's guardian."

"Well, the fact is—I am rather—"

"Oh! I will, cousin. I knew you would rather not say it. And they cannot be angry with me, now that I am so soon to leave." And Marguerite ran to open the dining-room door.

Judging from the tones of both ladies as they entered, their dissipation had been rather a failure, at least, Mrs. Danby was complaining peevishly of fatigue, and Georgy, in no pleasant voice, was expressing her disgust for some person or persons unknown.

"I knew them so well at Baden Baden, and afterwards at Boulogne, and to-night they scarcely looked at me—never returned my bow. It was entirely your fault, ma, for not taking a better box—so like our wretched economy, always in the wrong place. What are you doing, Marguerite, up still? Go and cut me some sandwiches, and move quick, miss." Pushing her rudely aside. "I want to come in, and warm my feet."

"I have something to tell you, Georgy."

"Move away Miss St. John," cried Mrs. Danby's sharp voice. "This dog again!" as Bello's gaunt face peered through the open door. "For the last time, I say—I will not suffer it!"

"Oh, Mr. Mortimer!" exclaimed Georgy, in a suddenly cheerful voice, as she caught sight of him. "I did not know you were here. Marguerite love, why did you not tell me?"

They both entered and shook hands with Mortimer, who greeted them in his usual short way. "An unexpected pleasure! You did not tell me that Mr. Mortimer was coming to dine with you, dear," said Mrs. Danby.

Danby knew what that 'dear' portended, and replied, "No ma'am—Maggy and I were so tired when we came in, that we forgot all about it—didn't we, Maggy?" He looked, and spoke nervously, wondering all the time how his wife would take the news, and what his own life would be for some months after the stock-broker had proposed for 'Maggy,' not Miss De Burgh.

"Take away my cloak, Marguerite,"

whispered Georgy, she had of late tried to convert Marguerite into a sort of waiting maid for herself. "And tell me how my hair looks."

"Very uncurled," Marguerite replied, meekly, taking away her cousin's wraps, and laying them on a table. "But it does not much signify. Have you had a pleasant evening?"

"Never mind!" was the gracious rejoinder; but in a tone too low of course for the guest to hear.

"How did you dare to sit up alone in this way when there was a visitor? Your face so red, and your hair all flung about in that ridiculous manner. You shall have it cut before you go out as governess."

"Georgy, don't be angry with me. I shall not trouble you long now."

Mortimer heard her voice in a second, and came a step nearer, "Miss De Burgh, it seems you are to lose your young friend soon. You will be lonely without her."

Georgy was sweet and affectionate in a moment, and regretted that circumstances compelled dear Marguerite to go out on the world, and so on.

"Well," returned Mortimer, "most young ladies go out in a similar way, and appear rather anxious to do so than otherwise."

"Ah—yes; and Marguerite is very patient, poor thing!"

"I hope her patience will never be so much tried again, Miss De Burgh, as it has been lately."

"Marguerite!" said Georgy, looking round sharply at her, with an expression that plainly said, "Have you dared to complain?"

"Explain, Maggy, explain," Danby interrupted. "Mortimer and Georgy are at cross purposes."

"The truth is, then," said Marguerite, very calmly and quite composed, as she addressed herself to both the women, "all my prospects have changed this evening. After you had left I thought deeply over what you have so often recommended to me, and decided it would really be best to follow your advice—although cousin Danby would not hear of it—and become a governess. I mentioned this before Mr. Mortimer, and—you will scarcely believe in such kindness—he has asked me to marry him, and live in his house for ever.

The faces of her two hearers had become various shades of colour during Marguerite's quiet little announcement; but a vague incredulity was the leading expression on both.

"Mr. Mortimer—to marry you!" gasped Georgy.

"Impossible!" said Mrs. Danby.

But Mortimer's face soon showed them that it was only too true; and, *bon gré mal gré*, they had to force out something like congratulations.

"You must really excuse our surprise," said Georgy, at length, with a desperate attempt at sprightliness; "but we have always looked upon you as such a confirmed old bachelor, Mr. Mortimer, and never dreamed of your changing your state; you have so often railed at married life and married happiness! However, I hope your case *may* prove an exception to your own predilections."

"Thank you, ma'am; I believe it will. *I* at least have every prospect of happiness, if Miss St. John can be content;" and he drew Marguerite to him very kindly, and laid his hand on her shining curls.

"Oh! Mr. Mortimer, I am so content, and so grateful to you!"

Her unembarrassment, her perfect self-possession, astonished even Georgy, who was far too well instructed not to have blushed or looked diffident under such circumstances; and when Mortimer—after wishing them all good night, shortly afterwards—gravely kissed Marguerite's forehead, her indignation almost boiled over.

Marguerite hastily bade good night, and ran upstairs the moment he had left. She longed to be alone, to think over her new prospects; and, besides, she rather shrank from Georgy's bitter temper and sarcasms. But, the partition of her bed-room being thin, she heard that young woman until late in the small hours, talking over her rage and disappointment with her mother; and, among other things, caught the following words, just before she fell asleep.

"But her innocence—her disgusting innocence—that is what sickens me most! She looked as cool with that hideous old man kissing her, as though she had been used to it all her life. For thorough designing craft, give me one of these innocent young creatures of sixteen—that's all!"

CHAPTER III.

THERE were few preliminaries to be gone through before the marriage. Mortimer wished it to take place at once; and Marguerite did not plead for delay. He made the most ample, unconditional settlements upon her; took a new house at Wimbledon, with gardens and conservatories to suit her taste; bought pianos, pictures, books—everything that could externally make the home of a young girl happy. In fact—as is always the case when men of his age commit these errors at all—Mortimer was desperately in love with a girl of sixteen, and would have given his whole fortune to please her.

And Marguerite? She was very calm at

first. Simply and childishly happy in the thought of her release from the De Burghs, or the prospect of being a governess, deeply grateful to Mortimer for his kindness in marrying her, and giving her such a home; and for some time she connected all this scarcely at all with Philip and the unaltered love she still bore him. But as the day approached, when the wedding-dresses were actually being made, and the thought was *realized* of her approaching marriage, her spirits sank, her colour went and came, her manner was fitful and nervous.

"You are not repenting your decision, Maggy?" said Danby, one evening, when they were alone, and he had been intently watching her face for some time. "It is still not too late."

"My decision—about what, cousin?" with a slight start. Marguerite was gazing dreamily into the fire, wondering what Italy was like, and if Philip were there now, and if she should ever see Italy; tracing ruined columns among the red masses of the fire, and fancying herself beneath their shadow, under the deep southern sky, with the scent of wild-flowers

and the hum of summer insects around, and a low voice at her side. "Had I anything particular to decide upon to-day?"

"I was not speaking of silks and pearls, or patterns of damask and ormoulu, Marguerite; but of the great decision involving all others —your decision of marrying Mortimer. Do you ever wish it revoked?"

"No," answered Marguerite, slowly, and without raising her head; "it was to be, I suppose. I had no other prospect; and Mr. Mortimer seems very well content."

"I should think he was. But you, child? A large house, and servants, and riding-horses won't make happiness, you know."

"But kindness will; and I am sure Mr. Mortimer will be kind to me. I heard from Manon, my nurse, to-day, in answer to my announcement, and she is so delighted and thinks it such a good thing for me. Although she is only a servant, Manon is very sharp-sighted, and I am glad to hear her opinion. How much she will think of me next Thursday!"

"Next Thursday!" repeated Danby. "Only three days more! She has never known love,"

he thought, as he continued to watch her almost infantine face. "She cannot realize the sacrifice of all such feeling that she is making in marrying an old man. Her perfect ignorance will be her safeguard."

But Marguerite was gazing once more at the fire, and tracing fresh fancies among its embers. Now they took the resemblance of wild sea-rocks, and she was again with Philip among the Morgane Caves—death close before her, but his words of love, that made even death itself sweet in her ear. Then these fell together; and in their new combination she saw the aisles of some dim old church, and by the altar she was standing, and the tall, slight form of Earnscliffe was at her side. Next this, too, faded; and an English garden rose before her, with summer sunshine on its flowers, and little children playing on the smooth turf, and two figures, hand clasped in hand, standing watching them—and the figures were still those of Philip and herself.

This was the sweetest picture of all. And she watched it so intently, that Mr. Danby had to speak three times before Marguerite heard that it was past eleven o'clock, and her

bed-time. And she started as all the fabric of her visions crumbled away before Danby's vigorous blows of the poker, preparatively to leaving the room. And she remembered that they were only visions; and that next Thursday she was to marry Mr. Mortimer.

The two following days passed by—the evening before the marriage came—and Marguerite was looking at the white silk and orange-blossoms she was to wear next morning. All the bridal paraphernalia lay ready —her own dress, the bridesmaids', the favours, the bouquets, the prayer-book bound in white velvet and silver, with embossed edges and filagree clasps—still her heart refused to realize it all. A vague wild hope was there, that yet it would never be; that at the last something would happen, some one die—Philip appear, and tell her that he was free, and she would marry him. She could *not* feel that to-morrow she would be Mortimer's wife; and once, when she woke suddenly from a dream of old days, in the night, the desperate thought crossed her, even now, to break it all off—return and live at Kersaint with Manon—do anything, rather than place another barrier

against the possibility of ever becoming Philip's!

But with the morning came Georgy to help her to dress, and she heard the unusual stir of servants in the house, and the sun shone cheerfully into her room, as with a good omen for her happiness, and the half-formed resolve vanished.

"You do look well, I must confess!" said Miss De Burgh, when the bride's dress was completed. "Toilette de Mariée is so exactly suited for peach-coloured complexion and downcast blue eyes. I never could look the bride as you do; and, then, as you don't intend to cry, the effect will not be spoiled. Most girls cry, you know, and red eyes and swollen lips are the result; but that is not your style."

"When girls are leaving home," said Marguerite, gently—so gently that even Georgy softened—"I can imagine their crying—but there is nothing to make me shed tears."

"Your home has not been too happy here, I must confess."

"Oh! my cousin Danby has been very kind; and, if you have not liked me, perhaps it has been my own fault. I hope you wil often come and see me now?"

Upon which Miss De Burgh kissed her with great unction; and was sure, if she had ever hurt dear Marguerite's feelings, she wished to be forgiven; and Miss De Burgh wept, and took the hand, and pressed it, of her young friend, who in two more hours would be possessed of many thousands a year, and two houses, and three carriages, and men-servants and women-servants, and Mr. Mortimer.

Mrs. Danby also blessed her fondly; and then they all got into the grandest hack-carriage Danby had been able to pick out, and drove—not to the parish edifice of St. Pancras, but to St. George's, Hanover Square, where all the bliss of fashionable people should be cemented, and where Mortimer, excited and redolent of white waistcoat, awaited them in the vestry, with some of his friends.

And the pompous clerk and a pink-eyed young clergyman were also ready. And, with her heart beating a good deal, and her hands very death-like cold, Marguerite felt herself led by Danby before the altar rails. Here the officials made a mistake, and placed a young relation—aged nineteen—of Mortimer's to stand as bridegroom; and the clergy-

man was just beginning to read, before the error was discovered; and the relation, burning with blushes, had to retire in ignominy, and Mortimer took his rightful place. And then the service went on; and, till death should part them, Marguerite vowed to be his, forsaking all other; and the ring was placed upon her chilly hand, and, after a few more prayers, she arose, and Mortimer stooped and kissed her lips—she was his wife.

Then they returned to the vestry, and the clergyman shook hands with them and wished them happiness; and the clerk and pew-opener smiled hopefully, in anticipation of large fees from the rich bridegroom; and, after a few attempts at tears among the ladies, and a good deal of signing of names, Mortimer, looking very proud, led his bride to the dashing new carriage which awaited them outside. And all the assembled boys exclaimed at the beautiful young lady, but wondered why her pa, and not the bridegroom, brought her from the church!

Marguerite being of course still in mourning, the wedding was to be a very quiet one; so there was only a small party at breakfast.

It went off as such things generally do. Miss Georgy was in an hysterical kind of good spirits—Mortimer radiant—Danby very silent. But Marguerite, who had kept up pretty well hitherto, grew paler and paler as the day proceeded; and when, at last, her lace and orange-flowers were exchanged for a travelling dress, and the moment arrived for her and Mortimer to leave together, the very hue of death was upon her face.

He felt her tremble violently as she entered the carriage, partially saw the stricken expression of her features when she first found herself alone with him, and thought it was all girlish timidity.

"Philip, till this moment I never knew half my love for you!" was her thought.

And so they started for their honeymoon in the Isle of Wight.

CHAPTER IV.

For some time after Philip's arrival in Rome, he was as silent and misanthropic as is the wont of disappointed lovers. His experiment of going into the world again had proved so signal a failure in Paris, that he now went into the opposite extreme—shunning all companionship but that of Neville and a few of his artist friends, and wandering like a ghost among churches and picture-galleries, taking lonely rides in the Campagna, and being excessively brief with any unfortunate English people who made advances to him.

It was no fancied disgust with the world, no affectation of misanthropy, as such moodiness usually is in young men of Philip's age

—for he had not sufficient small vanity for affectation, and cared little what people thought of him; but he was really heart-sore, and in no mood for new acquaintance. When, by chance, he was forced into any kind of society, he compared the Englishwomen he met with Marguerite, and they disgusted him. The insipidity or liveliness of the girls, the stupidity or cleverness of the married women were equally distasteful to him. They all lacked that fine grace, that *spiritualness*, with which nature had so largely endowed her. Their faces had no glow, their voices no music, after hers; and he came back to their lodgings—Neville and he lived together—invariably with a fresh accession of ill-humour on these occasions.

"You should go more among foreigners, Phil.," said Neville, one evening. Philip had returned early from an English party, to which he had been actually forced by some people he had been intimate with in London, and sat silently watching the artist, who, his cigar in his mouth, was sketching the outline of a large picture he contemplated. "You would get on better with them; and the

Italian women would be sure to like you, with your pale face and sentimental conversation. I believe some of them are handsome, though really I never look at them. The peasants who sit to me as models are worth a whole room-full of beauties in my eyes!"

"Let us speak of a more interesting subject, Neville. I am weary of the whole sex—English, French, or Italian."

"A la bonheur! I wish from my soul you were. But you are only in a state of rebound. I know you so well. Just the state from which men fall into their worst errors. Some pretty face will arise, and undo all your woman-hatred in an hour. The carnival is next week!"

"I shall go into the country while it lasts. It makes me sick to see the senseless buffoonery with which human beings can be amused."

"Well, I am one of the common herd. I shall lock up my studio, and be as happy as any school-boy of fourteen. It does the eye and brain good to be relieved from work for a few days; one returns to it with such zest afterwards. And then there are groups of

form and colour to be seen in the carnival, better worth studying than the old masters themselves."

"You have such an object in life, Neville! Everything is sweet to you that can minister in the slightest degree to your one passion—ambition."

"Why do you not call it love of my art? But you would be far happier too, Earnscliffe, with any 'one passion,' as you are pleased to term it. Your longing for distinction was feverish once; but as soon as won, you wearied of it, as of everything else."

"I have not wearied of everything. Exactly *that* of which I could never weary I have never possessed."

"The reason why you think it beyond the reach of satiety."

"You have never loved, Neville. It is a subject utterly beyond—or beneath you."

"You are wrong, both in fact and inference. I *have* loved, and with an intensity equal to your own—perhaps greater—for I have only loved once, and I have analyzed the passion as deeply as you have done. Quiet household affection lives on, Phil, and even increases

with years, that placid feeling we entertain for the woman who orders our house, and is the mother of our children. She becomes plain and middle-aged, and rather sharp tempered; but our feelings do not change towards her. Habit, community of interest, the mutual tie of children, these are bonds which only strengthen with years; and when she dies, the old man feels that half of his own existence has passed away. But this is not love—such as you and I have known—such as you thought would be eternal! If the passion of a week could last out a life-time, men would be gods, and we should want no further heaven held out to us. But it dies, Phil.!—dies—that men may return to the world; dies—of its own nature—of its very excess!" The pencil fell from the artist's hand, and his face had an expression quite unlike his usual careless one.

"Neville—you have actually loved!"

"I am past thirty."

"Oh! of course every man feels what he dignifies by that name. Not one out of a hundred love."

"I have; and have been deceived, like the

rest of us. But to return to yourself. You believe that if you had possessed the object of your last adoration (you have made such half confidences that I shall probably, unwillingly hurt your feelings) your heaven would have lasted; that, having lost it, you and she will be eternally miserable. My friend, you will be a very happy man five years hence, when you have passed the age of sentiment, and are beginning to care for position, and have entered the House and shone in your first speech; and as to the young lady, perhaps she is married by this time, at all events she will not be constant to your memory for a year."

"She may marry—she will not forget me!" replied Philip, in a low voice.

"And so add another to the scores of guileless young creatures who every year swear to love and honour one man, with the warm words of another yet thrilling in their heart! I thought your idols were all perfect, Phil.?"

"This one was. Too perfect for you and me to speak of, Neville."

"Thank you! Well, we will profane her no longer. Come and tell me how you like my sketch."

Philip rose to look, and their conversation dropped for the present; but the next morning when they were wandering beneath some ruins a few miles from Rome, he abruptly returned to it.

"Neville, tell me more of your own love. I am in a state when it is pleasant to hear of the disappointment of one's friends!"

It was a soft spring day, only the middle of March, but as mild as an English June, and a very mosaic of wild-flowers at their feet looked up to the intensely blue sky. Neville seated himself on a broken fragment of marble, and leisurely drew from his pocket, first a cigar case, then his sketch book.

"I will talk of my love, mon ami, if there is any chance of curing yours by doing so; but I must smoke and sketch at the same time. It is a subject that sends me to sleep by itself —it requires accompaniments."

"Give me a cigaretto, Neville."

"Ah, you are mending fast! You have been too sulky to smoke hitherto."

"The open air, the very fact of lying at one's length among the daisies, makes smoking a necessity."

"Don't apologize. I have seen you look enviously at my meerschaum every evening for the last week, and knew what was coming. I cannot conceive why you ever gave it up. In my troubles—when the committee of the R. A. rejected my first picture, and hung my second ten feet high in the octagon-room for example—I smoked more furiously than ever."

"And in your love affair?"

Neville smoked away in silence, and half closed his eyes, as though intently watching the effect of light and shadow upon the blue Campagna, but there was a dreamy look upon his sunburnt face.

"It was years ago!" he exclaimed, suddenly; "I was quite a boy.

"And which was false? or was either?"

"Philip, it is not a pleasant remembrance; but as you seem to care about it, you shall hear. I started in life young. You remember what I was when I left Harrow. I came at once to London, with few friends, no connexion; and I had to make my way alone and unassisted, except by my own energy. I was ambitious then, as I am now; but I was also confiding and warm-hearted, beyond the usual

run of boys of that age. Not in the least sentimental, as you know; but full of all the first fervid passion of youth, uncontaminated by much knowledge of the world, or by that premature excess which deadens the heart more than years of after-experience. In short, I was then capable of loving as men can love once, with that love which in one case out of a thousand may be well bestowed; in the others——you shall hear how mine was.

"I lodged in the house of a Scotchwoman; a widow, and a person of a certain position in life—at least, her husband had been a major in the army, but losses of money now obliged her to do something to increase her income, and she kept a kind of boarding-house for young men—medical students, young artists like myself, who preferred this kind of life to common lodgings or chambers. The house was respectable; I was recommended to it by decent people; and everything was in appearance quiet and as it should be.

"This Scotchwoman had an only daughter —Philip, I cannot enter into many particulars, I loathe thinking of this time at all, I have never recurred to it before, and I must be

short—a girl of seventeen, lovely as an angel, with fair bright hair and Madonna-like eyes, that seemed too soft to reflect any human passion. All the young men in the house admired her, of course; but I, before I had been there three weeks, was wildly in love with her. I could neither eat nor sleep, I trembled if her dress touched me as she passed—it maddened me if she spoke or smiled with another man—she haunted me till I could not draw a line, and my companions all used to laugh at my white face and my altered manner. In short, I loved her as boys *can* love.

"I got over my timidity and spoke—she trembled—she flushed—faltered—and burst into tears. 'It was madness, we must not think of it, we were so young. But she loved me!' I went half-wild with excess of happiness.

"With stolen interviews—a whispered word when we passed each other on the stairs—a pressure of her hand night and morning—I was forced to be content for some months. She said her mother must know nothing at present, that she would never hear of our binding ourselves by an engagement so early,

and so on. But at length I grew impatient. I told her that I would wait no longer; either she must fly with me and become my wife by a Scotch marriage, or I would leave her for ever. I could not live on in the same house any longer and be as strangers. She hesitated, wavered, consented to become *mine*. Phil., even now I feel the rapture of that moment."

Neville drew his wide artist-hat more over his eyes, as though to shade them from the slanting sun, and leisurely cut one of his pencils; but his hand trembled very slightly.

"We planned to go to Scotland, and be married; then return at once, and ask her mother's forgiveness; and I should work for both, and we should all live happily together. This was the project. As you may imagine, I had very little money—not enough to take two people half way to Scotland; and, with much shame, I was obliged to confess this to my beloved, and to tell her that a few days' delay would be necessary for me to try and obtain sufficient for the journey. To my surprise, she answered by taking a little purse full of gold from her pocket, and laying it in

my hand. 'It was a present from her godfather. She had had it for years.'"

"I don't know whether the circumstance aroused any suspicions in my mind, or whether it was a kind of natural instinct; but, after I had taken the purse and carried it away with me, I felt strangely excited and ill at ease. Though I believed her implicitly, the thought would arise, 'Why had she so much money ready? was it girl-like so quickly to offer it?'

"We had settled to elope that very night; and I had gone out of the house to evade suspicions, but was to return silently, when everyone was still, and we should then steal out together. I remember I walked on and on through the crowded streets, but saw nothing that was passing around; I felt dull and stupified, as though under the influence of some narcotic. That I should be unusually agitated on the eve of a clandestine marriage, with the woman that I adored, was natural; but there was a fear—a breathlessness—in my agitation that amounted soon to actual pain; and, utterly unable to shake it off, I at length turned my steps homewards—resolving

to remain quietly in my own little attic at the top of the house, until the appointed hour.

"I entered with my latch-key, and met one of the women servants in the passage. 'Where was Mrs. M——?' I asked, as coolly as I could. 'Gone out.' 'And Miss——?" 'Oh, in her own room; she was not very well.' This was so exactly like the plan we had determined upon, that I felt re-assured, and ran upstairs towards my own room, when, on the second floor, I heard voices that arrested me in a moment. Hers—I should have known its slightest sound among a thousand —and that of a man.

"Her own room was on the first floor; that from whence the voice came, was a small sitting-room of her mother's, to which none of the boarders were usually admitted. I walked up to the door. I stood still there, and listened (for the only time in my life, Phil., there was no dishonour in it at such a moment,)—listened and heard—thank God! not my shame, for she was not yet my wife.

"I must tell you there was one inmate of the house, towards whom, I had always felt an uncontrollable dislike, a young Pole of high

birth, and rich, but who was boarding in the family, for the sake of learning English. He was there some months before I came, and I had never anything to do with him; but a certain air of impertinent superiority in his manner, made me conceive an instant dislike for him the first day we met. I never saw him speak to Miss M——, beyond a passing word of recognition at dinner, if he was placed near her. Indeed, she seemed less friendly with him than with any of the other young men; towards most of whom I had in turn, entertained some boyish jealousy.

"He was pale and small, and with a worn dissipated face, although still young. But it mattered not. She loved him. Had loved him long—guiltily, as I knew the first moment I heard the tones of their voices together. And the money that was to have assisted in making her my wife, came from him!

"'Difference of position,' I heard him say, 'would not allow him to make her the reparation of marriage.' 'But Neville will do it,' he added, laughing, 'and we can hoodwink him hereafter as we have done already.'

"I entered the room at once. Not bursting with fury as you might imagine; but quite

cool and collected. Only I felt that my face was bloodless, and my teeth clenched.

"Good God!" she exclaimed, starting up, and advancing towards me for a second, then shrinking back to him as though for protection. I only looked at her once—never spoke to her; but I walked up to him.

"'Monsieur Neville, your return is unexpected, and, permit me to say, undesirable. You have mistaken your room, I think.'

"Phil., I wonder I did not kill him; for I had the strength of a young Hercules at all times, and now the whole fire of my nature was up! I dragged him to the top of the landing—lost though she was, I respected her presence sufficiently for this—and then, I repeat, I wonder I did not kill him! When his cowardly white face was undistinguishable from the mass of blows I had rained upon it I hurled him with all my force down stairs; and have a dim recollection of women shrieking, and doctors being sent for, and Mrs. M—— wringing her hands, as she came in and found her best lodger lying, a bleeding mass, in the passage; but I left the house without even collecting my things, and saw none of them again.

"Of course I expected to hear from the count—for he wasn't dead—but no message came; and one of the other boarders, a fellow-student of mine, told me they all seemed extremely anxious to hush the matter up, and prevent it from being known out of the house.

"Two or three days afterwards I discovered the purse still in my pocket, and sent it back to Miss M—— by my friend, who was just going to leave for Italy; and from that day, I never have known what became of her, or whether the mother had connived at the whole thing, or not. In short, I have never heard their name, nor have breathed it until now. But, Phil., I have never loved again! *Loved*, mind; for that was pure, perfect love. I have felt as others do a dozen times.

"Pah! my cigar is out. Give me a light, old fellow, and let us get on before the noon-day heat. I can finish my sketch at home." They walked on silently for some time, then Philip exclaimed—

"But you must admit, Neville, that yours was an entirely exceptional case—one from which no sweeping deduction can be drawn."

"Yes, in the utter depravity of so young a

girl, it *was* exceptional. Without precisely resembling my own case, however, are there not thousands of others where one or both have been as miserably infatuated, then deceived? Look at yourself, you have been so a dozen times already."

"Ah! but none of this dozen was the true one. You confuse the Eros with the Anteros. I have not been deceived now."

"Well!" replied Neville impatiently. "But something—circumstance—Fate—what you will, has stepped in and thwarted your devotion and your happiness. And, if it had not, Earnscliffe, I repeat that passion *must* die of itself—burn—consume—turn again into nothing like the ashes that are falling from my cigar—and it is far better so. Give up such love as I have done! Be content with the common hopes—the coarser pleasures of humanity!"

"I wish I could," returned Philip.

* * *

Late in the evening of this day when Neville was at work, and Earnscliffe, lazily outstretched, was reading the English papers, an exclamation broke from him which made the artist start round in surprise.

"Good God! Neville."

"Well?"

"She is married!"

The *Times* fell from his hands; and Neville picking it up, read at the head of the list of marriages, "William Charles Mortimer of Portland Place, London, and Chesnut Grove, Wimbledon, Esquire, to Marguerite Lilla, only child of the late Percy St. John, of Kersaint Manoir, Brittany, Esquire."

"It *is* soon, Phil; sooner even than I expected. But it was sure to be so; and these things are much better 'got over' at once. If your wife had died, you know, you might have married Miss St. John, and both have been wretched for life—it is much better as it is."

"She will not forget me!" said Philip, abstractedly.

He did not hear his friend's consolation; Marguerite rose up before him, as he had left her only a few months ago—weeping—clinging to him—promising never to love another—and he felt that he could have no rival, even in her husband.

"The devil she won't!" exclaimed Neville.

"A pleasant prospect for William Charles Mortimer, of Portland Place and Chesnut Grove! However, I suppose you will return to life now that the dream is over?"

"It is *not* over. My love was just as hopeless before as it is now that both are tied; yet I indulged it."

"Well, for everybody's sake, it is to be desired that you will keep away from England —for the present, at least. When Mrs. Mortimer is an elderly matron, with grown-up children, you might see her again in safety."

"I have no wish to do so, I can assure you. Except an occasional visit to my uncle while he lives, I shall spend my life abroad."

"A few years of it only. The objectless, nugatory life of continental Englishmen would not suit you after thirty, as it may now."

"I shall begin a new book to-morrow," said Philip, after a long silence.

"Bravo! You would not have written for six months to come but for Miss St. John's marriage. And, Philip, I predict that this will be your best work—better even than that famous one wherein you felled and trampled upon all your great friends. I suppose women-

kind will come in for their share of sarcasm in this ?"

"On the contrary, there will be very little about them. I am weary of the subject."

CHAPTER V.

Two years had now elapsed since Marguerite's marriage—two unchequered and serene years, wherein no one month had greatly differed from the preceding or following ones. But, surrounded by all that wealth can give, and Mortimer unchanged in his kindness and devotion, her life palled heavily upon her. The worn-out simile of a bird imprisoned in a golden cage, could never have been more aptly employed. She rose each day, and her French lady's maid attired her in her elegant morning dress; she breakfasted with Mortimer from Sèvres and Dresden—after which he started for the city—and then she had only herself to please for the remainder of the day.

She might look at her costly rooms, or walk into her conservatories and gaze at their rare contents, or order her carriage or her horse, or play on her magnificent piano, until dinner-time;—then Sèvres and Dresden and her husband again. After dinner he usually fell asleep, and there was the evening to be past in somewhat the same manner as the morning.

Oh, how she wearied of it all! With a feverish longing she would think of her old free life, that sweet, untrammelled liberty of her childhood, and feel how gladly she would give all that she now possessed to return to it. No flower in her conservatory gave her the pleasure of those wild-flowers on the Breton heaths. The splendid decorations, the pictures, the books with which she was surrounded, were valueless compared to the dear old rooms and their familiar belongings, at home. She felt that her life was void. And, although her great sweetness of temper, and the real regard and gratitude she felt towards Mortimer, prevented her manner from ever expressing discontent, there were often times when her youth would rise irresistibly strong within her, and the *want* of her existence be-

come an actual pain. The indistinct yearning she had experienced at Kersaint, before she ever knew Philip, returned now with tenfold strength; for this vague desire was no longer without an object. Marguerite, in the interval, had loved with all the strength of a deep and fervent nature; and her heart actually sank, as she looked forward to years and years—her whole life, in fact—still spent in the same way as now. No other love than what she felt for her husband—no higher object than her own amusement.

Marguerite was not without deep natural religion, and, under different circumstances, such feelings might have been fostered until they took the place of earthly affections. But she was so wholly without a guide, so entirely thrown upon herself for support in everything, that it chilled even her belief. If, in a faint voice, she ever spoke to Mortimer on any subject connected with religion, his reply would be—"Yes, yes, my dear, of course; but don't think too much of these things. At your age, they can only make you melancholy. You have no sins to repent of."

And Marguerite would gently reply—

"Very well," and really think her husband must know best.

Had she had a child, her whole life would have changed. The strong, honest passion of maternity must have swallowed up Earnscliffe's remembrance, and have given her a fresh interest in the world. Many girlish loves or disappointments survive, and even strengthen, through the first year of married life; for a husband may be cold, or unworthy, or repugnant, and so cannot efface the memory of the lover; but with the first feeble cry of the new-born—the first touch of those tiny fingers—he is dethroned. To Marguerite, however, this also was denied; and so in idle luxury her life wore on.

Her husband's acquaintance were, for the most part, men of about his own standing; he had never cared much for women's society; and knew little of their wives and daughters; and the few families they did visit were none of them congenial to Marguerite. Once or twice a month he dined out; occasionally they had a dinner party of old men at home. The conversation, on these occasions, as may be conceived, was not of a nature likely to

afford her much interest. Foreign politics, as they affected the money market—the state of crops, as they affected the money market—the fall of an empire, or the birth of a prince, simply as these affected the money market—were discussed; until it seemed to Marguerite that the whole of creation was interesting to her guests, only on those points which could affect the rise and fall of the stocks.

The presence of Georgy de Burgh was quite a relief to her at these festivals, especially when Mrs. Danby was not able, from her delicate health to attend; for at least Georgy did not talk of 'Stocks,' and was thirty years younger than any of the company. Miss de Burgh was very glad to 'keep in' with Mrs. Mortimer now, and always very affectionate in her manner to her; and Marguerite was only too happy to lend her her carriage or riding-horse, or to send her bouquets of hot-house flowers; she was quite glad when these things could give anyone else more pleasure than they did herself, and had long forgiven the petty slights which Georgy had shown her in her cousin's house.

"Are you very happy, dear?" inquired

Miss De Burgh, as they sat side by side on the sofa, after one of Mortimer's dinner-parties, and while the men were still in the dining-room; "you look so pale to-day."

"Happy!" Marguerite started and coloured. "Oh, yes! He is very kind to me; I have everything I wish."

"I see—under similar circumstances, I *should* be happy. You think too much of Philip Earnscliffe, dear."

"Georgy—indeed!—"

"—No, Marguerite—don't deny, nor wince as if I had done you some dreadful injury. I do not blame you in the least; but still it is a pity that you should do so. You are quite losing your fine colour, and look years older already."

"I am glad of it! It makes the difference seem less between Mr. Mortimer and myself."

"Oh, oh, Marguerite! *I* cannot believe that you wish to pass for a 'Goody Twoshoes;' but everyone else will, if you talk in that way. Fancy a woman of your age liking to look old! The fact is, you are too much moped—no going out, no society (for these fusty old dinners are

worse than nothing). Why, in the world, don't you go to the opera like other people?"

"Well, I have thought of it; but Mr. Mortimer comes home tired, and we dine so late—and, besides, I do not think he cares much for music—I mean, not as I do."

"But these are no reasons why *you* should not go. You are a married woman, and want no chaperone. Mr. Mortimer need not accompany you, unless he likes; and surely would consent to dine earlier the evenings you wish to go to the theatre. So fond of music as you are! It is absolute cruelty that you never have any opportunity of hearing it."

"I should like it very much indeed," said Marguerite, her eyes glistening. "How kind of you to think of it for me."

"Nothing about my own place in your box," thought Georgy. Then aloud—"Well, dear, I really do not like to see you leading such a lonely life. I shall speak to Mr. Mortimer about it this very evening."

"Oh! I will ask him, thank you. He would prefer it from me. I need only go on those evenings when he dines out, so he will not miss me. And would you come with me

the first time, please? I have never been to a theatre in my life!"

"To be sure I will!" Georgy cried, delighted at the success of her manœuvre. "There is to be the 'Lucia' to-morrow, and it will be a benefit night in addition. Make your husband take us places for it, even if he cannot decide about a box."

"Oh! I know that he will get a box, the very day I ask for it," returned Marguerite, simply. "It gives him such pleasure, if I express a wish for anything."

"Quite a model-husband, in short! You ought to be very happy. Marguerite, that is another new dress. Do you know that you dress exquisitely for a person caring so little for life? I cannot think where you learnt the art, living all your life among savages!"

"It comes naturally, I suppose. But you are wrong in saying I care little for life. You shall see to-morrow evening how well I can look. I have a new white crape, with bouquets of lilies-of-the-valley and pearls, that I shall put on for the occasion."

Her face was still lit up with the child-like pleasure the thoughts of the opera had

awakened, when some of the men entered. Mortimer was one of the first. He came to his wife in a second, looking, with his red face and portly figure, as unlike her husband as possible.

"How merry you seem, Marguerite. Miss De Burgh, you must come and see us oftener. I think you brighten up my poor lonely wife."

"Ah, we are conspiring!" said Marguerite, with her sweet smile. "Perhaps you will not be so well pleased when you hear what we are speaking about."

"Try me! I am not often offended with you."

"Well, I am so very fond of music, and—Georgy has been saying that the opera would be such a treat to me sometimes. If you thought you would not mind taking a box for me?"

Mortimer looked delighted. Although he was always trying to please her, it was so seldom Marguerite would ask him for anything.

"Come here, Danby!" he cried to his friend, who had just entered, "and see how we are all changing. Your demure little

ward has just asked me—what do you think? to get her a box at the opera!"

"Ah! Georgy must have had a hand in that, I suspect," said Danby. "Madgey never heard of operas at Kersaint. Did you, Mrs. Mortimer?"

"Never—that is ——" her perfect truthfulness compelling her to speak. "Cousin, I did *hear* of them once,"—and Marguerite blushed deeply.

"Well, there was no great harm if you did, child," said her husband. "What are you looking so red for?"

"Who used to talk of operas at Kersaint?" went on Danby; "Philip Earnscliffe, I suppose!"

Oh, what would Marguerite have given to master herself better! When Earnscliffe's name was mentioned, or even any other subject that remotely bore upon him, the blood *would* always rise crimson to her very temples, and her hands turn cold in a second. Was she never to overcome her old girlish feelings, now that she was another man's wife?

"Come here, Marguerite!" cried Georgy, who was watching her narrowly, "I want you

to tell me about your new songs, and to know if you can lend me some waltzes ?"

Marguerite felt only too thankful for the interruption, and going quickly to Miss De Burgh's side, leant down over a heap of new music until her long hair almost covered her burning face.

"Take any you like, Georgy," she said, in a low voice, "I have not even tried them over yet. Mr. Mortimer brings me something new every day."

"Marguerite," interrupted the other, in a whisper, "you are very demure and excellent; but, if I were your husband, I would not wish Philip Earnscliffe to appear in London."

When the other guests were gone, Marguerite went with Georgy up stairs to her dressing-room; and, as Miss de Burgh was cloaking herself, said, timidly, and as though with an effort—

"I think you were unjust in what you said this evening. I have told you before that I cannot help blushing sometimes, when—when —old names are mentioned, and I am always angry with myself for doing so. But, I assure you, I am most grateful, most attached to

Mr. Mortimer. I should indeed be worthless if I thought of any one but him now. Do you not believe me?"

Miss Georgy nodded her head two or three times at herself in the glass, and tied on her little pink hood with great precision. Then she turned and looked about.

"Gilt toilet-table, Brussels-lace cover, enamelled dressing-cases, silver lamps, silken couches. Marguerite, answer one question truly—which do you care for most, all these pretty things—your husband's gifts, you know—or those half-dozen well-worn books I see on the book-shelf in yonder dark corner; on the title-page of each of which is written, 'Marguerite, from the author?' Now answer, with all your wondrous truthfulness!"

"Oh, Georgy! you know I never cared for trinkets and ornaments—and—and—I am so very fond of reading!"

"It is extremely bad for you then, always being alone, and poring over those books. In time, you will fancy that you cared twice as much about it all as was really the case. If you went about and amused yourself more, you would soon forget your little romance. I have

had seven or eight, and yet, if I married, I should never think of any of them again."

Marguerite shrank away. It seemed such profanity to compare *her* love—buried and hopeless now—with any of Miss Georgy's experiences!

"At what time shall I call for you to-morrow?" she said, hastily. "Mr. Mortimer dines out; so I will have my own dinner early."

"Well, I suppose you would care for the overture, though I don't. You ought to be at our house at half-past seven, and do bring me a bouquet, ma cousine—of flowers that will look well with pink. And I shall tell mama there is no place for her! Two young women, if one is married, look much better alone, than when the box is stuffed up with chaperones and dowagers—*Au revoir!*"

CHAPTER VI.

When her toilette was complete the following evening, Marguerite surveyed herself with more pleasure than she had felt in her own appearance since her marriage; and, devoid of vanity though she was, she could not be insensible of her own extraordinary beauty.

She had become much stouter than she was at Kersaint; and a certain expression—if not of melancholy, of thought—gave a greater interest to her formerly childish face. Her luxuriant hair was partly gathered round her head, partly fell upon her neck, in a style peculiar to herself (it was this, with the somewhat foreign cast of features, that always impressed one with the idea of some old picture

when looking at Marguerite) and a magnificent set of pearl ornaments—a present from her husband that day—well became her youth, and fair satin-like skin. In her bosom was a bouquet of rare hot-house flowers, all white.

"Am I, indeed, as beautiful as Philip said?" she thought, when her maid had left, and she was waiting for the announcement of the carriage. "What would he think of me now!"

She started, and turned from the glass, as her husband's step was heard entering her dressing-room. He, too, was dressed for the dinner to which he was going, and his face looked a shade redder than usual contrasted with his ample white waistcoat.

"Well, Madgey, child, how do you look in your finery? Not so bad, upon my word!" He drew her to him, and kissed her forehead. "You seem very happy, little woman, at going out alone for the first time?"

"Oh, Mr. Mortimer! I should be more glad if you were coming too."

"Quite sure, Marguerite?"

"Quite; I mean"—with her usual sincerity —"if it were anywhere but to the opera. But,

perhaps, I *shall* enjoy that more alone, than if you were there, and I knew you were wearied to death with the music."

Mortimer looked the least in the world disappointed, then he replied kindly—

"Marguerite, you are a good child to speak the exact truth. It is not likely that what pleases you should me. Look at the difference between us!" He pointed to a cheval-glass, where the two figures stood reflected. "What do we look like, Madgey?"

"Father and daughter, sir: I have always said so. And no father," she added, gently, "could ever have been kinder to a child than you are to me, or have more merited her gratitude. When I look at all these pearls, and flowers, and costly dresses, I feel quite ashamed."

"Ah, Marguerite! if I was a younger man you would feel very differently. Gratitude never enters into love, I am told. However, you know nothing about *that*"—she turned her face quite away—"and, perhaps, you are just as happy as many who make love marriages. At all events, what has never been felt, cannot be missed!"

"I have everything to make me happy," said Marguerite, in a low voice; "I have no wish ungratified."

"Not one?"

"Not one—since I have been your wife."

"Well, enjoy yourself as much as you can to-night. I hope the opera will be a new source of pleasure to you—perhaps you have been too much alone hitherto."

He kissed her again, and they parted—Marguerite hoping she had said something pleasing to her husband, and he with the undefined feeling of pain he always experienced when she spoke of loving him as a daughter, and of her gratitude for his kindness.

Georgy was ready dressed when the carriage stopped in Tavistock Street, and appeared in high spirits as she jumped in.

"Marguerite! how exquisite! I never saw those pearls before."

"Mr. Mortimer gave them me to-day."

"And that darling little cloak?"

"Another present."

"And your lorgnette—and your bouquet—oh, and mine!" as Marguerite gave her one containing all the rarest flowers of the season, and Miss Georgy held it up to the light—

"What nonsense people talk, when they say riches cannot make happiness! I am sure they could make mine! Have you got a box, or only places for to-night?"

"Only two places in a box, and they were extremely difficult to get, as it is a benefit night, and we were so late in deciding upon going. But I am to have a box of my own for the future. Mr. Mortimer has heard of a very good one that is to be let for the remainder of the season."

"I hope we shall be in a good place! You will create quite a *furore* with your style—and—your newness! Perhaps you will condescend to say what you think of *me*."

Georgy was really looking very handsome, in a pink satin dress, unusually *décolleté*, and a profusion of diamonds (which, if real, must have been extremely valuable, and were always spoken of as an heir-loom in the De Burgh family) in her hair. Her high colour, jetty curls, and cool, undaunted air, formed an admirable foil to the delicate hues of Marguerite's complexion, and her youthful, girlish manner; and when they entered the box, which was one of the best and most conspicuous in the house,

they did, to Georgy's intense delight, create quite a sensation.

'Who is she?'—what is she? passed from mouth to mouth, the moment Marguerite appeared, and always with the same reply. No one knew. That she was 'nobody,' if an Englishwoman, must, of course, have been self-evident; but her features and style were so uncommon, that every one soon pronounced she must be some young foreigner of rank, while Georgy was at once set down as her *dame de compagnie*. The overture was nearly over, but Marguerite's attention was instantly riveted to the music; and, when the first act began, all around her was as completely forgotten as though she had been seated in her own drawing-room. She had never entered a theatre before: the actors were not actors to her, but real and living persons; and, listening to Grisi and Mario, such a new world of delight, such undreamed of enjoyment opened upon her, as would have paralyzed all power of expression, had she attempted to give utterance to her feelings. Her eyes glistened, and the colour went and came in her cheek, as she leant

forward, her hands clasped together, over the front of the box, in an attitude of the most unconscious attention—while the eyes of half the men in London were fixed upon her.

"At length!" exclaimed Georgy, as the first act ended. "I have spoken to you in vain about eight times. Now, will you kindly be a little more like other people? Perfect though hands may be, it is not usual to clasp them together at a theatre, as though you were praying. And so very unconscious of all the men who are staring at you!"

"Hands—praying!" echoed Marguerite, dreamily. "Oh! Georgy, have I done anything improper?"

"Not at all, dear! You have succeeded, however, in being singular; and, as every lorgnette in the pit appears to be upturned to your face, you are probably satisfied."

Unwilling though she might have been to offend a connection who would take her to the opera, and ask her to dinner, this young creature's jealousy could never repress itself at Mrs. Mortimer's superior beauty; and Marguerite, feeling by the tone that she meant to be spiteful, coloured deeply as she leant back

in her chair. The flush remained on her cheeks, making her tenfold lovelier, and people looked at her more than ever.

"How everyone looks at me, Georgy!" she whispered. "It is not very polite of them to do so, even if they see how unused I am to these places. Have I done anything *very* strange?"

"For pity's sake, remember there is no one to hear, and do not be so simple with me," replied her companion, harshly. "Accept your rôle of new beauty, and play it through. The men will not look at you half so much when you are known, or some new face has arisen to eclipse yours."

"I hope not," answered Marguerite, quietly; and then (seeing that Georgy was not in the sweetest of tempers at the small attention her own satin and diamonds excited) she remained silently gazing about the house, whose size, and lights, and tiers of brilliant women, seemed like the realization of one of her childhood's fairy tales.

In the next box to their own was one individual whose eyes scarcely for a second had quitted Marguerite's face; but it was not

until the middle of the performance that her own glance carelessly rested upon him. For an instant her heart leaped wildly—she thought it was Earnscliffe! The delusion was momentary: it was one of those accidental likenesses more of contour and general style, than of feature, or even expression; still, it was sufficiently strong to arouse a thousand old feelings in Marguerite; and, even while Mario was singing, to make her eyes steal timidly to the stranger's face.

"Do you know him—do you know him?" whispered Miss de Burgh. "You seem to be looking at him a great deal!"

"I—oh! I know no one; but I should like to hear his name."

Georgy knew: she knew everything. "The marquis de St. Leon—a young man of very high birth, and rich. He has never lost his money in any of the revolutions, for his father, although a noble, made it by speculations in America, and it was not invested in France. I wonder whether he remembers me! I danced in the same quadrille with him one evening, three or four years ago, at Hombourg! I shall bow when he looks next!"

"Please do not bow, Georgy!" returned Marguerite, very quickly.

"Why not, Mrs. Mortimer? May not one person out of all your admirers, be permitted to look at me?"

Marguerite felt that their neighbour was not looking at Georgy; but she was silent, knowing that in her present temper, any opposition would make her more resolute, and also that it was not in the De Burgh nature to let a living marquis be unmolested, if there were the slightest clue to acquaintanceship. Her innate sense of good breeding, told her that Georgy was wrong in giving any sign of recognition; and she turned her own face resolutely towards the stage, resolved that at least the stranger should not implicate her in anything Miss De Burgh might do or say. An additional reason for this feeling was, that the name of St. Leon sounded familiar to Marguerite, and a vague recollection connected it with something she had heard of her mother's life. But this she of course did not mention to her companion, as it would at once have formed another excuse for recognition.

Not until the conclusion of the act, could

Georgy attract the attention of the young Frenchman, who was still intently watching Marguerite's averted profile, while he apparently listened to the music; but when, at length, the curtain fell, and Marguerite leant back, so that her face was hidden from him, his eyes casually rested on that of Miss De Burgh. She bowed, and smiled in a moment. The marquis half rose, and made a profound salutation; but with the most unequivocal look of surprise, for of course Georgy's face was utterly foreign to him; and this circumstance, united to her general appearance and dress, gave him at once an impression the exact reverse of favourable of the lady.

"Grisi est ravissant ce soir, monsieur," leaning over towards him.

"Mais, oui, madame!" with an actual stare of astonishment at her coolness.

"I see, monsieur le marquis, that you do not recognize me."

He was about to reply in a strain more complimentary than respectful, when he glanced towards Marguerite—who *felt* what was going on, though she still averted her head—and her blush of shame—her innocent young face—

made him retract his unfavourable opinion of her companion.

"Mad, probably," he thought—"utterly mad, like all other English women." Then aloud, "Madame, I must infinitely regret that I do not recall to myself the exact circumstances under which I formerly had the honour ——"

"It was at Hombourg!" cried Georgy, delighted with her progress. "We used to meet nearly every evening at the Kur Saal, and once, monsieur le marquis, I had the pleasure of dancing with you at a grand ball given to the duchess Stephanie!"

The pain on Marguerite's face was now becoming so evident that the marquis told Georgy he remembered her perfectly, and that his near sight must plead his excuse for not having done so sooner; and he was soon so polite, and so evidently anxious to improve the acquaintance, that Georgy grew radiant—not considering how small a share she had in the cause of his *empressement.*

They continued talking for some minutes, and then Georgy touched Marguerite's arm, thinking it must appear strange to the young Frenchman that her companion looked so steadily away from him.

"Monsieur, allow me to introduce you to my cousin, Mrs. Mortimer, née De Josselin St. John."

The marquis slightly started, then bowed very gravely. "De Josselin!" he repeated.

"Her mother's name," Georgy hastened to explain. "The De Josselins of Beau Manoir in Brittany—a very ancient family."

"I may then claim relationship as an introduction," he remarked, in an extremely different tone to the light, easy one in which he had been chatting with Miss De Burgh. "My father and the mother of madame were, if I mistake not, cousins german."

"And we are all related!" cried Georgy, artlessly—"oh, how delightful!"

But Marguerite looked at him very earnestly, and, with the most perfect simplicity, said—

"Monsieur, it gives me real pleasure to have met you. You are the first of my mother's family I have ever seen."

"I must demand a thousand pardons," said the marquis, now speaking in his own language, and bending towards Marguerite, "for having looked so often at your face this evening; but I have been vainly endeavouring to recollect

where and when I had met you before. Now the mystery explains itself. I am in possession of a miniature, in which there exists the most extraordinary likeness to yourself; and that miniature, madame, is the portrait of your mother, Lilla De Josselin, taken in her early youth."

"My mother's portrait!" repeated Marguerite, eagerly. "Ah, I possess no likeness of her!"

"And she is no longer living? Excuse my question; but it is years since I heard news of anyone bearing the name of De Josselin."

"My mother died when I was born, monsieur." The tears started to her eyes.

"Need I say the pleasure it would afford me to be allowed to restore the picture to one who has so strong a claim upon it?"

"Would you really give it me? I scarcely like to rob you of such a treasure!"

"I prize it," replied the young man, gravely, "as having belonged to my own father, who valued it above everything on earth; but it would give me infinite pleasure to see it in your possession."

"Then come and see us to-morrow, and

bring it with you, if you will, indeed, be so generous. Oh! this *is* unexpected pleasure. How much I shall have to tell Mr. Mortimer!"

"Can it be possible that she is married!" thought St. Leon. "She has the face and simplicity of a child. And *what* a face!"

His manner soon displayed such intense admiration, that Miss Georgy, although well content that she could claim any connection with a marquis, felt by no means pleased at the turn things were taking, and the earnest conversation in which she bore no part.

"You are forgetting the beloved music, it appears!" she whispered, maliciously.

Marguerite felt her meaning, and turned away towards the stage; but her heart was full at the unexpected meeting with one of her own race and nation, and for a moment she could hardly repress tears at Georgy's unkindness—for she always could discern by the tone, one of Miss De Burgh's little implied sarcasms. Soon, however, in the absorbing interest of the last scene in that touching opera, into which Grisi's genius throws so deep a pathos, she forgot even her new cousin; and when the

last notes of the 'Lucia' died away, Marguerite was trembling and breathless with excitement.

"Is it over?" she said, turning nervously round. She was looking so strange that Georgy was startled, and exclaimed—

"Heavens! Marguerite, what ails you?—are you going to faint?" And the marquis who had already risen to depart, bent towards them and enquired anxiously 'if madame was ill?'

"Oh, no!" returned Marguerite, trying to smile. "I am only rather nervous—it is very foolish, I know; but this is the first opera I ever saw."

"You silly child," said Georgy. "Did you think Grisi was really dead?"

"If I might presume to offer my escort?" St. Leon hesitated.

"We shall be really grateful," returned Georgy, promptly, "for, strange to say, we are alone this evening."

He joined them at the door of their box; and they were soon endeavouring to make their way through the crowded lobby.

"Lean on me, madame, I entreat," he said, in a low voice to Marguerite. "You look terribly overcome."

She was indeed deadly pale. The heat, the light, the unusual excitement, and, above all, the likeness, which in so many looks and tones of St. Leon had reminded her of Earnscliffe—had been too much for her susceptible nature, and, as usual, when anything strongly affected her, her heart beat thick and painfully.

"It is nothing," she whispered, "only a passing faintness; I am unused to these great crowds, and shall be better the moment I can breathe the air."

Just then one of Georgy's former friends happened to pass them on his way out, a young lordling it was, that she had once picked up in Switzerland when he was still in jackets, and with whom she had contrived at intervals to keep up a bowing acquaintance ever since. Seeing her with the new beauty, and accompanied by so well known a man as St. Leon, he condescended to be civil, and they shook hands—the lady very warmly.

"What an age since I have seen you, Miss De Burgh. Will you take my arm? it's too crowded for three. Good evening, marquis. Deuced hot, aint it?"

St. Leon answered with a stately bow. He

was, however, overjoyed to get rid of Miss De Burgh (whose underbred manners and showy appearance, had inspired him already with as much horror as he could feel for anything connected with Marguerite), and be able to devote all his attention to his lovely companion. He was obliged almost to support her down the great stair-case; while dozens of envious glances were bestowed upon him by those of his friends who had been watching the rapid growth of his progress with the unknown beauty during the evening; and now saw her leaning upon his arm for support, as though he were an old friend.

When they reached the vestibule, Georgy and her young friend were nowhere to be seen.

"They are probably in advance," said St. Leon. "Let me conduct you outside for a few moments, the air will refresh you. Indeed, unless you wait very long, you will probably be obliged to walk some distance to your carriage, owing to the immense crush to-night."

The cold night-air revived Marguerite instantly. "I am better now," she said, glancing up at her cousin. His figure looked so like Earnscliffe's, seen in that uncertain

light, that involuntarily her hand pressed upon his arm—then trembled a little.

"That is right," he answered. "Let us walk on, madame, somewhat apart from the crowd. The air is the best thing for you now, and it will give your friend time to join you; they are probably detained by the crowd."

Miss de Burgh was not likely to hurry when resting on the arm of a lord; and it was fully twenty minutes before they all met. During this time the marquis had learnt the name of Marguerite's husband, and their address, and had promised to bring the miniature the following day, 'if madame would do him the real favour of accepting it.' And her glistening eyes, as she turned to thank him, were sufficient reply. After Miss De Burgh had joined them, they had still to walk to the carriage at some little distance. And all this time the young Frenchman was thinking that he had never, in all his experience of beauty, met with any woman to compare to his English cousin, and complacently exulting at her very amiable reception of himself: while Marguerite's quiet reflection was, "He is like Philip—certainly like him, but not a hun-

dredth part so handsome or so noble looking—all the fine intellect is wanting, and the resemblance half pains me from its incompleteness."

When they were on their way home, Miss Georgy displayed a great accession of spirits.

"What a delightful evening—a lord and a a foreign marquis! I saw those odious Miss Malcolms looking at me as we came to the carriage. They were stalking by with their mother, like three great spectres in the moonlight, and no vestige of a man with them! Lord —— was *so* attentive, and is coming to call. I heard you asking the marquis. What a convenient thing cousinship is! I had really no idea what a coquette you were till this evening. But then, you are half French, so I suppose it is innate, like your taste in dress. Do you admire the marquis de St. Leon, Mrs. Mortimer?"

"Yes—or rather there is something about him which attracts me."

"Indeed! well, you are candid."

"A nameless something—I cannot explain what it consists in, to you, Georgy."

"Do not trouble yourself, I perfectly understand. St. Leon is very handsome, and a

finished man of the world. Simple people always admire that style. Heigh ho! here we are at my hideous old home. Thank you for my pleasant evening, Marguerite, and take me again as soon as you like."

And Miss Georgy, yawning extensively, ran up the paternal door-steps, leaving Marguerite to drive home in the moonlight with the sweet notes of the 'Lucia' still vibrating through her brain; and the voice—not of St. Leon—but of Philip in her heart.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM that evening a new life seemed to have opened for Marguerite. Delighted that, at length, something could be found affording her real pleasure, Mortimer insisted upon her frequently going to the opera; and it was a source to Marguerite of such genuine, unmixed enjoyment, that soon these two, and often three evenings in the week, were looked upon as a matter of course, and anticipated each time with all the zest of a child.

The lovely face of 'the stockbroker's wife' was soon familiar to all *habitués* of the opera, and many envious remarks were made upon St. Leon, the only man who ever appeared in her box, with the exception of Mortimer,

(who was now and then over-persuaded to go, and invariably slept the whole evening.) Occasionally, Marguerite took Miss De Burgh; but, in time, she greatly preferred going alone. She loved music passionately; she went for the music, and listened to it as few English people can listen—came home to dream of it, and sing what she had heard to her own piano and for herself. Her voice had greatly improved; and, after the constant instruction for two years of the best masters in London, Marguerite now sang as not many in private life are ever heard to sing. She often thought of Philip's prediction about her voice, and wondered with a half-sigh, what he would think of her now that she had so much improved!

Of Philip himself she never heard. One long letter he had written her from the Tyrol, two or three months after they parted—a letter that had been read and re-read, until known by heart, and then stored away with her other most precious relics—but after this she heard no more. At the few parties to which she ever went with her husband, she met with no one who spoke of books or authors; she never saw the papers, or reviews

in which his writings were noticed; as far as all outward communication went, Earnscliffe was dead to her. Still, however, she thought of him—still was his name never forgotten in her prayers—still his books were read and treasured—and all this with the most entire unconsciousness of wrong.

But, perhaps, the one thing which kept Philip's image most strongly alive, was the likeness that she traced to him in her cousin.

The young marquis called on the following day, after their first meeting, with the portrait of Mrs. St. John, and Marguerite had received him with all the unreserved cordiality of a relation, and made him stop to be introduced to Mortimer, and dine with them. From that day he became intimate at the house. Although his society possessed no *charm* for Marguerite, she liked him. He was refined, well-educated, superior to every one else around her, and had all those minute graces of conversation and manner in which a well-bred Frenchman excels. But he was artificial, and, to Marguerite, this deprived him of all the interest he might otherwise have inspired. Everything that in Earnscliffe was natural, St. Leon

seemed to have learnt. Although he was never vapid—seldom actually common-place—he rarely said anything forcible or striking. If, sometimes—when they were talking together upon some subject higher than the usual strain of every-day conversation—Marguerite's eye kindled, and her voice trembled, he admired, but could not follow; and would reply to her enthusiastic remarks with some well-known conventional criticism that damped her in a second.

"I shall be jealous of your handsome French cousin, little wife," said Mortimer, one evening. Marguerite, accompanied by Georgy and St. Leon, had been spending a long morning at the Exhibition.

"Jealous, sir!—surely, you cannot mean it. Do you wish to be like Gaston?"

"Not that kind of jealousy, my dear. Jealous!—jealous of his being your companion so often."

Marguerite laughed. "Don't you think Georgy De Burgh would like to marry him?" she asked.

"I think Georgy De Burgh would marry any one."

"Oh, yes; but I sometimes think she really likes Gaston."

"And do not you, Maggy?" looking rather earnestly in her face.

"Yes—I like him—very much, at times; and then, he is my only relation, except my cousin Danby. But he seldom really interests me. This morning, among the pictures, even, I forgot so often what he was talking about! When we were looking at that exquisite thing, 'The Awakened Conscience,' I had just read all the story of the girl's life in her suddenly anguished face, and, turning round to Gaston, I began telling him it; when he interrupted me, and said, 'the finish on the carpet was painted *à ravir!*' It was so like him! He cannot appreciate the ferns and wild-flowers in my wilderness half as much as all the rare exotics in your hot-houses, sir."

"Well, I don't blame him there," said Mortimer, complacently. "Our flowers at Wimbledon are the finest of any near London (without doubt the young man never saw anything like them in his own country, for all he's a marquis); and your wilderness, as you call it, Maggy, is a horrid damp hole: I shall

not forget the rheumatism I caught the only time you ever persuaded me to sit down there! However, if he does not like your weeds, I am sure you seem to like the same books; for I always find you reading together, or talking of what you have just read, when I come in."

"Yes," said Marguerite, smiling, "but we never agree in our criticism. Gaston always admires the very parts that I pass over, and he detests anything approaching to sentiment, which, you know, I *do* like."

"Poor Maggy! you like what you don't understand. But I am glad to hear I need not be jealous!"

"Oh, Mr. Mortimer! what is cousin Gaston to me?"—and the perfect truth in her face must have dispelled it, if a slight shade of jealousy had really crossed his mind.

"It was very kind of him though," Marguerite went on, "to persuade this grand countess to call and invite me to her house; but I don't care much about going. I am not shy—still I tremble a little at appearing among hundreds of strangers, and knowing no one but Gaston. I wish you would go, Mr.

Mortimer; it is not too late for you to change your mind."

"My dear, I am not suited for the Countess of E——'s parties. With your beauty and manners, you are fit company for the Queen; but it would quite spoil the effect for *me* to be shown as your husband. Besides this, I'm not fond of music, and ten to one but I should fall asleep when some of the grand singers are in the middle of their bravuras, or else clap my hands when I ought to be silent! No, child—go and enjoy yourself; I shall be quite content with your description to-morrow morning. It is time for you to dress, Marguerite—go and see how grand you can make yourself."

"I do not care about it," she replied, slowly preparing to leave the room. "I would much rather be going to the opera."

"But I care for it!" said her husband. "With your own appearance, and my money, you *ought* to be in the best society in England!"

From the first moment he knew her, St. Leon had longed to see his lovely young cousin in the same world as that in which he

himself moved. He knew how her excessive beauty, and her accomplishments qualified her to shine there; and also that with Mortimer's great wealth, the fact of his being on 'Change was a misdemeanour, it was just possible for the English aristocracy to forgive. And, for some months past, he had been thinking over every possible plan for obtaining an introduction for Marguerite to the house of some one of the leaders of fashion, whose mystic stamp would afterwards enable her to pass current among the *confrèrie* of London exclusivism. At length, he had been partially successful. The Countess of E——, at whose house he had been long intimate, was about to give the largest musical entertainment that had been attempted during the season; and at this entertainment, St. Leon determined Marguerite should be.

"Your party will be charming," he said to the countess, as he sat next her at a dinner party, the day after the cards were issued. "All parties at H—— house must be so! But as yet, your invitations have not included the best amateur voice in London."

"Is it possible? I thought I had asked everyone."

"But this is no one!"

"Ah! The fact is, marquis, I have often attempted those sorts of people at my large musical parties; but they an invariably failures." "People of one's own condition must of course be asked to perform on their horrid instruments, or with their worse voices. If one wants good music, one pays Grisi and Alboni."

"The lady I alluded to is 'no one' in the language of London life; but I have the honour of being her very near relative!" remarked St. Leon, a little stiffly.

"Oh, a foreigner! But do you know, my dear friend, that *that* makes all the difference? A foreigner may be of the highest rank, yet not have chanced to bring introductions to England. I shall be delighted to make the acquaintance of your charming relation." The countess had three growing-up and exceedingly plain daughters, and lost no opportunity of being gracious to young men of good property.

"My cousin is, however, married to an Englishman," St. Leon pursued demurely; "Mr. Mortimer, a very rich stockbroker."

"Heavens, what have I got into!" thought the lady. "It will be such a crush," she mentally added, "that perhaps these dreadful people will not be seen, or pass for professionals." Then aloud, "You must tell me Mrs. Mortimer's address, or write it down for me. My poor head is so overladen with names of people I care nothing about, I may forget those whom I should really like to know."

But St. Leon did not allow her memory to fail in this instance; and a day or two afterwards, to Marguerite's extreme surprise, the card of the Countess of E—— was left in Portland Place, accompanied by an invitation to H—— House, for the 15th of the following month."

"What does all this mean, Gaston?" she cried, when he next paid his accustomed visit. "I am sure you know something about it!"

"It means this: The Countess of E—— is one of the leaders of your London society, and has so constantly heard me speak of my accomplished cousin, Mrs. Mortimer, that at length she has ventured to call and ask you to her house; when she sees you, she will find how great a gainer she is by the introduction."

"Fi donc! You have so often promised to pay me no compliments! Am I really to go, Gaston—do you think Mr. Mortimer would like it?"

"Mr. Mortimer!—toujours Mr. Mortimer! can you never pronounce for yourself what you would like, ma cousine?"

"Well, I think I wish to go; but he will decide best—he is so sensible!"

And Mortimer, who soon afterwards came in to luncheon, gave his opinion, with very little hesitation, in the affirmative. Marguerite thought St. Leon's account quite simple about Lady E——'s wish to know her, but her husband was more flattered and pleased at the unexpected grandeur than he cared to acknowledged. Like many other people, he had always been fond of speaking against the aristocracy, whom he did not know; but was now overjoyed at the prospect of being admitted among them! Or, rather, of Marguerite being admitted. To do him justice, the triumph was for her, not himself; and he hastened that very afternoon to order her new diamonds, and a new dress, in his desire that her first appearance should be a brilliant one.

From the beginning, Mortimer very sensibly declined the invitation for himself, and said his pleasure would be in Marguerite's enjoyment. But, when in her sheen of white brocaded silk and diamonds—and, more than this, in her glorious bloom of youth—she entered the dining-room for his approval on the evening of the concert, the natural thought crossed him of the admiration and flattery to which she would be exposed, and the charm this new life must soon possess for one so young as his wife. And something painful was in the thought!

"Marguerite, you are indeed magnificent! Dress, and diamonds can add even to the perfection of your face. We grow more like Beauty and the Beast, every day!"

"Mr. Mortimer, I will not hear you say those things; tell me you do not mean it, sir!" coming close to him, and looking steadily in his face. "Does it give you the slightest pain, my going without you to this grand party?" she added.

"No, Maggy. Have you ever known me so selfish?"

She did not reply, but still looked at him

very earnestly, as though striving to read the expression of his face; then she repeated, "I wish I had not decided upon going."

"What! when it gives me such pleasure?"

"Yes; I feel that it would be better for me not to go."

[Was it some unbidden presentiment of the future—some dim fore-knowledge that in the great world of London life, she would again meet Earnscliffe, that influenced Marguerite as she spoke?]

The carriage was announced, and her husband led her to it; then, kindly kissing her, bade her be happy, and sing her very best. Afterwards, with dignified pride, he told the coachman to drive to H—— House. But, when he returned to the empty dining-room—still thinking of his wife, and this new sphere of admiration and excitement into which she was thrown—there was again a very mixed feeling in Mr. Mortimer's appreciation of their freshly-arisen grandeur.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was actually a hush of admiration when Marguerite made her appearance in the Countess of E——'s stately reception-rooms—unattended, unknown; but with the quiet self-possession that was innate in her; and covered with diamonds that might have formed the dowry of a young duchess. "What extraordinary beauty!"—"What style!"—"What eyes!"—"What a figure!"—said the men, most of whom soon recognized the fair unknown they had so long admired in her box at the opera. "What consummate coolness," said the young ladies. "She must surely be an actress to keep up that unconscious look while every eye is fixed upon her."

Lady E—— was exceedingly civil in her reception of Marguerite, and her regrets that Mr. Mortimer was unable to come; for St. Leon was already at her side, and hearing every word she uttered.

"I am really indebted to you," she whispered to him; (but so loud that Marguerite heard it). "At the close of a season, such a face—such matchless grace as your cousin's, is indeed refreshing among all the well-known pale faces of London! Mrs. Mortimer, allow me to introduce my sister to you—Lady Millicent Gore."

A pale, interesting-looking woman, seated near the countess, bowed to Marguerite, and made room for her by her side. "My sister is so engaged in receiving her guests, that you must allow me to take her place in introducing you to our friends, Mrs. Mortimer. As a foreigner, most of the people about you must be strangers."

"I know no one, madame, except Gaston," glancing at her cousin, who remained hovering near her, as though to afford her encouragement. "I have never been out before!"

The lady, of course, thought she meant in

England, and returned; "I fear our English society will not please you as much as your own. All my early life was spent abroad, and when I first returned to England, I was incessantly struck with the great difference in the tone of our manners. The want, above all, of that perfect ease and absence of restraint, which characterises good foreign society—that of Paris especially."

"I was never in Paris. Until I came to England, all my life was spent in Bretagne."

Gaston advanced to her side.

"More of the old *noblesse* of France, and of their old courtly manners, yet linger in Bretagne than in any other of our provinces, madame," he said, addressing Lady Millicent.

"So I have heard; and that strangers are very rarely admitted among them. From what part of Brittany do you come, Mrs. Mortimer?"

"From the very wildest part of the extreme west—a part that few English people, I find, have ever heard of."

"Yet you speak English so well—with only the slightest foreign accent."

"My father was English, madame—so either language is familiar to me."

"You speak it better than your cousin," said Lady Millicent, smiling. "The marquis has an excellent accent—but he has not our idiom."

"No," replied Marguerite; "and he will always render French idioms into English—word for word. Gaston, do you hear that mine is pronounced the best English? It is a point that we often argue."

Marguerite's perfect absence of what is usually termed manner, and a certain childish tone in her voice—rich, and sonorous though it was—soon attracted the notice of the people who stood near enough to hear her. "Can she possibly be a married woman?" was the remark of all who heard her name. "She does not look more than seventeen."

Some acquaintances of Lady Millicent's stopping to speak to her, her attention was taken from Marguerite, who turned towards St. Leon. "Gaston," in French, "how kind of you to be here already for my sake. I know that you dislike going early to parties."

"But you do not want my protection, Marguerite. You look as composed as though you had been to every party this season."

"I do not feel so I can assure you. My heart beat violently when I came in, although I may have looked unconcerned. Do you know, at the very last, I tried to persuade Mr. Mortimer to accompany me."

"Thank all the gods he stayed away," thought Gaston. "Ah, you will not mind going out alone the next time," he said, aloud. "*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui côute!*"

"Yes, that is all very well; but I do not suppose I shall have any more invitations. I know none of Lady E——'s guests."

"Oh! they will be introduced to you, and only too anxious to invite you to their houses, when they have heard your voice. In the meantime, let me tell you who some of them are."

"And in English, Gaston. I think it attracts notice for us to speak French—everyone turns round to look at me as they pass."

"No wonder! Marguerite,"—lowering his voice, and leaning over her—"You know not how infinitely lovely you look to-night—lovelier than ever."

"Thanks to my husband's diamonds. Ah, Gaston! you pay poor compliments. You

should have told me that dress and ornaments could make no difference!"

"Had I done so, ma cousine would have found occasion to laugh, as she always does at my pretty speeches. But, believe it, or not, madame, there is no one here to-night—and yet most of the wives and daughters of the English nobility are present—one half so beautiful as yourself."

"Fie, Gaston! look at that exquisite creature who is passing now. I am nothing compared to her—the lady in very pale blue I mean." It was a débutante in all the flush of extreme youth and health, and with the brightest colouring of complexion and hair.

"Beauty of the devil!" returned the marquis, contemptuously, "nothing more."

Marguerite gave one of her clear silvery laughs.

"Dear Gaston! after all, we had better talk in French, I think. Your English idioms are really too much for my gravity. Ah! some one is going to sing—who is it? I surely remember that handsome face."

"That handsome face belongs to Mario, madame! He and Grisi are going to sing a duet."

"And I shall be expected to sing in the same room with them. Oh! I do feel shy now."

"More than you did at the prospect of singing before dukes and countesses? You told me yesterday you had no dread at all."

"Before them, certainly not. They may know no more of music than I do; but before great artistes,—yes Gaston," in a low voice, "I should like to be introduced to *them*."

"N' en parlez pas ma cousine! One is not introduced to professional singers! If you ever require them in your own house, you will engage them, and pay them so much a-night. Voilà tout. You do not suppose that they are acquaintances of the countess of E——?"

"Well, I wondered at their caring to come into private society, after all the varied excitement of their own life; but of course, if they are paid for it, there is an inducement. Hush! they are beginning. Ah! now for real enjoyment."

After the duet, which was delicious, a great amateur harpist performed a long piece with the assistance of an amateur pianist of immence execution, and no taste (all of which

Marguerite thought remarkably unpleasing.) Then the duchess of Somebody sang—very mildly—then Herr Some one else played on an extraordinary instrument, that he had been fifteen years in constructing, and fifteen more in learning to play; then lady E—— came to Marguerite. She had been introduced to several people in the mean time by Lady Millicent and Gaston; and was now surrounded by a little circle. A Russian prince; an English earl; one or two younger sons, St. Leon of course, and a celebrated author. To the latter she was speaking with much more animation than to any of the others. She wondered whether he had ever known Earncliffe!

"Mrs. Mortimer, I have come to claim your kind promise. Marquis, will you take Mrs. Mortimer to the piano?"

Lady Millicent good-naturedly followed, thinking Marguerite must feel timid amidst such crowds of strangers. "Shall I stand beside you?" she whispered.

"Oh, if you will be so kind, I should greatly prefer it! But I am not very nervous now." Marguerite could not see any of the profes-

sional people, (who of course retired into unknown places between each performance) and she felt re-assured by the hope that they would not appear, or hear her.

"Have you any notes?" asked Gaston, much more flurried than she was, about her success.

"No! I never use notes. What would be best for me to sing?" to Lady Millicent. "Italian, or English?"

"Italian perhaps, as the last song was an English one; but let your own taste guide you."

After a few bold chords—she seldom played the regular written accompaniments to her songs—Marguerite began an Italian bravura; and, in a second, every one seemed electrified. Her beauty had already attracted so much notice, that even in that crowded assembly a dead silence prevailed, as she took her seat; but no one expected more than a mediocre performance. 'With her face,' people said, 'very little voice would suffice,' and Gaston had purposely mentioned her musical talent to none, that her success might prove all the greater from not being anticipated.

Marguerite never sang better in her life. Constant attendance at the opera, and first-rate instruction, joined to singular natural ability, had given her an artistic style of expression almost unknown among young ladies—a style which made even Grisi rush hastily to the concert room, to see if some new singer had arrived beside herself. During amateur performances, the artistes usually waited in patient resignation, and without hearing a note.

"Ecco una voce! Gran' Dio! Ecco una voce!"

Could Marguerite have seen the face of the great artiste, her triumph would have been far greater to herself than it was at all the praises that were showered upon her at the conclusion of her performance. Lady E—— was almost in tears of delight that such a début should have been made in *her* house, and seized both of Marguerite's hands as she was going to rise from the piano.

"One more, Mrs. Mortimer—only a little ballad—anything you like; but really we cannot so soon lose your exquisite voice!"

Marguerite smiled, and re-seated herself.

"One of your Breton romances," whispered St. Leon, close beside her. He knew too well the secrets of effect, not to be aware how a plaintive ballad would tell after the Italian bravura she had just sung.

She chose, this time, the wild dirge that she had sung to Earnscliffe on the first evening he ever heard her; and, perhaps, that recollection gave more than usual pathos to her voice. The lights—the strange faces around her vanished. She was by the open window again at Kersaint, with the summer sunset streaming into the old room, and gilding the graceful outline of Philip's figure, as he stood in the deep embrasure watching her. She remembered how, even then, her heart beat at singing before him—more than it had done this evening at performing before the great world of London! And when she concluded, amid a universal and genuine murmur of applause, the only words she heard were those of St. Leon.

"Thank you, Marguerite." His voice sounded so exactly like Philip's that she turned round with a start; and something

in her cousin's attitude at the moment completed the resemblance.

"Phil—Gaston—oh! cousin—I mean." Her colour went and came, and a sudden emotion shot through St. Leon's heart.

"She blushes—turns pale—looks to me in her first moment of success—then shrinks from me again."

He was no coxcomb (for a Frenchman) but, while handing Marguerite to her seat, he ventured, very slightly, to press the little hand upon his arm.

"How you blushed, Marguerite, as you finished your last song! were you conscious of it?"

"No—yes—Oh Gaston! my thoughts were far away."

"You are complimentary, madame."

"But you need not tell any of these good people I was not thinking of them."

"And I then am completely beyond consideration?"

"Why I see you every day, dear Gaston! You know I could not be thinking of you."

"What a dreadful coquette!" remarked some well-trained English girls, who were

watching Marguerite and her cousin. "Look at the way she smiles and beams up in that man's face! But then all Frenchwomen are the same—And a married woman too—which makes it worse! I cannot conceive why Lady E—— invites such people to her house."

"Let me take you to supper," whispered Gaston. "I see our hostess bringing up some one to introduce to you, but remember that you are engaged to me."

* * * *

From this evening Marguerite became the fashion. Much as we talk about exclusiveness, our aristocracy is probably less exclusive than any other in the world; and great wealth or great talent can at any time gain admittance more easily into London society, than into that of half the capitals in Europe. Marguerite too, had riches, talent, beauty; and, at least on her own mother's side, high birth. And besides all this she was half a foreigner—a circumstance which in itself casts down many barriers in England—so her husband's business and himself were tacitly ignored by the great people, who wished to secure Mrs. Mortimer for their parties. He was asked as a

matter of course; but had the good taste invariably to decline, and Marguerite gradually became accustomed to go every where alone. The slight feeling of uneasiness he had experienced on her début, wore off, as he perceived how little her new kind of life altered his wife. She told him so exactly the admiration she received, the compliments that were paid her—poor Gaston's included—that it would have required a more suspicious nature than even Mortimer's to harbour any feelings of jealousy; and he was soon prouder than he chose to confess, of his wife's success, and of her entrance into 'grand society.'

"But Marguerite," he said, one morning at breakfast, as she described some brilliant ball of the previous evening. "Does not the thought often cross your mind, among all these handsome young men, of your plain old husband at home, making you wish that you had not chosen so young, and before you had seen anything of the world? Confess Marguerite —such is sometimes the case!"

"Never, Mr. Mortimer. I have never yet met anyone among them who really interested me. I still like Gaston far the best among all

the young men I am acquainted with—and you know precisely how I feel towards him."

"Then, Maggy, must I really believe that your heart is pre-occupied?

"I believe it is so, sir!" in a very low voice, and turning away as she spoke.

(Mortimer knew not the unacknowledged memory which made all others seem so poor and weak compared to it—knew not that his own strong safeguard was in the shade of his wife's old lover!)

That season passed away—another came—and Marguerite's popularity rather increased, than waned. Her extraordinary voice made her a welcome acquisition everywhere; and the whole musical world were now as anxious to engage her for their concerts, as they were to get Grisi or Alboni. To say—"But Mrs. Mortimer was not there!" became, in itself, a condemnation of any entertainment professing to unite all that was distinguished in music; while her beauty, and exceeding grace of manner, secured her as much homage among men, as did her voice among party-givers.

When Georgy said that the world and amusement would soon efface Marguerite's recollections of Philip, she was, to a limited

extent, correct. To forget him was not in Marguerite's nature—to love again was impossible; but she had not now the time to think of him as formerly. The desire of distinction that lies dormant in every human heart—desire, which, had she married Earnscliffe, would never have germinated in hers—now took the place of a softer interest in life. Young, gifted, and admired beyond the usual lot, Marguerite was happy—if such a life can ever make a woman's happiness—at all events, her existence flowed smoothly on, and no longer stagnated as in the first dull years of her marriage.

Had she never met Philip again, she might have continued, thus far, at least, content. And so—with a dim foreboding, perhaps with a touching sense of her own weakness—her daily prayer was, never to see him more. When she first married, she had wished just to meet him—just hear his voice—look once again upon his face. Now that her knowledge of life, and of her own heart was greater, she earnestly prayed never to be thrown across the path of the only man whom she had loved. A lowliness in her opinion of herself was almost a fault in Marguerite's character. She was

not strong-minded, had slight confidence in her own strength, threw all her reliance upon others; and her religion being rather an undefined belief, than a guiding principle of common life, no wonder she shrank away from the thought of ever listening more to the voice which once held her in such utter mastery.

But, though conscious of Philip's undiminished influence, she had schooled herself during all these years into a kind of lethargy concerning that buried passion of hers. The outward world filled up the void of her existence: she respected her husband and called it attachment: she was intimate with St. Leon and called it friendship. And Mrs. Mortimer would often repeat to herself how fortunately her lot was cast—how entirely without cause for repining was her state. [Sure sign that the cup of life is not full, when we assure ourselves with so much emphasis of our great and manifold blessings!]

As may be conceived, Georgy De Burgh and her mother made indefatigable efforts to get acquainted with 'great people' on the strength of their dear Marguerite's success. But this she knew from the first was impossible; and

Mortimer at length made one or two such unmistakeably plain speeches on the subject, (when they had been wearying his wife with supplications to get them invited to Lady Someone's ball), that they had taken serious offence; and although Danby still continued to call as usual, Marguerite now saw little of either of the ladies.

But St. Leon was a most constant visitor at the Mortimer's. His relationship gave him, of course, a claim to more than ordinary intimacy, and, whatever his inmost feelings might be towards Marguerite, he had as yet so scrupulously concealed them, that she had not the slightest conception of anything more than friendship on his part. Her own manner to him continued the same as it had always been—perfectly open and unconstrained. As she had told Mortimer, she preferred her cousin to any other man with whom she was acquainted, and, perhaps, had her heart been wholly unoccupied, there might have been danger in this constant intimacy: for St. Leon, graceful, handsome, and, above all, a finished adept in the art of pleasing, was the very man who, under dif-

ferent circumstances, could have charmed a simple being like Marguerite. But whoever has really loved is wise, once and for ever, in all things concerning love. Remembering Philip, she saw precisely where Gaston was shallow and unreal; if his voice softened she knew he was acting; if he read to her, or sang to her, or walked with her, she remembered how she had done all this once before with Philip beside her, and the Present seemed in a moment as a faint cold shadow, compared to that warm and golden Past.

And yet, while Philip's recollection always stood between Marguerite and St. Leon, the resemblance, real or fancied, which she traced to Earnscliffe in his features, was the greatest interest her cousin possessed to her; and a sudden look or expression of his would often so bring back Philip and old days, that—utterly unable to master her emotion—she would blush and tremble, just as she had done years before at Kersaint.

These blushes, these tremours, fatally misled St. Leon!

CHAPTER IX.

FOUR years passed away after Earnscliffe parted with Neville in Rome, before he again returned to England. The first eighteen months he had spent in Italy and Greece; the latter part of the time in the East, among the wildest, least frequented districts of Arabia and Syria. During this period—but only at intervals—he had continued to write, and each successive work bore evidence of deeper thought, and was imbued with a healthier tone, than had characterized even the best of his earlier writings. In this long intercourse with nature—freed from the enervating influences of social life—Philip had regained much that the world, with its pleasures and

disappointments, had taken from the fresh genius of his youth. In the absence of all human companionship, he had created for himself a life of wild and lonely peril, that was eminently calculated to strengthen into self-dependence his formerly yielding, somewhat indolent character; and he was now returning home, unconscious of the change, with renewed ardour and ambition, and his whole moral being braced into a manlier, more vigorous tone.

An event had occurred too, during this interval, which Philip was obliged to confess, removed his strongest reasons for living abroad, and his morbid distaste for England. He was once more free! After three years of ill health, spent, first in the spendthrift grandeur of her father's house, then in poverty, uncheered by either affection or respect, Lady Clara died. Earnscliffe did not hear of her death without a certain emotion, although it was impossible it could cause him anything like real grief. He had written to his wife after Lord St. Leger's break-down, offering all the assistance in his power, and entreating her to receive some allowance from him. "For my sake I ask

you to accept it," he had written—"for the sake of our old childish days. Show sufficient generosity to give me this pleasure!" But, whatever softer feelings Clara's better nature may have prompted, the letter remained unanswered; and Philip heard of her no more, until he accidentally read the announcement of her death in an English paper at Smyrna. She had then been dead some months; and, by the following spring, Earnscliffe finally quitted the East, and resolved to return for good to his own country.

Although, in his exile, he had often tried to persuade himself that deserts were far more suited to him than cities, he could scarcely repress the pleasure with which, after his long absence, he once more found himself in Paris. Paris, radiant, as of old, with equipages and toilettes, and pretty women, and with a bright April sun lighting up the tender green of the Tuileries gardens—whose lime-trees and chestnuts were already budding in the early spring, and casting soft, feathery shadows upon the white statues beneath them. Philip walked about the whole afternoon of his arrival, enjoying, like a boy, the gay scene

around. The streams of people—the glittering shops—the splendid *cafés*—the flower-decked balconies of the boulevards—all that makes Paris so pleasant a lounge on a fine spring afternoon, when the brilliant sky, and clear, sharp air, form a striking contrast to the dim, grey atmosphere, and foggy streets of London.

He met several old faces among the idle crowds on the boulevards; but not one that lit up with an expression of recognition at seeing him—(Philip was greatly changed, sunburnt, and stouter, and a beard of two years' growth completely metamorphosed the once soft, dreamy character of his features); and, at last, he turned in to a solitary dinner at Les Trois Frères, where he was soon obliged to allow that *coquilles de volaille à la financière*, *epigrammes d'agneau* and *merigues glacés*, tasted excellent, after the wild meals improvised by himself in Arabia Petræa; and that chablis and hock were preferable to black coffee and arrack of the desert.

"Neville was right," he thought. "I remember, he told me that at five-and-thirty, I should have done with sentiment, and be glad to return to the substantial things of this

world. I am not quite so old, but I have most certainly no sentiment left; and, as for the world—Garçon, bring me bills of the theatres for to-night." He glanced over the names of the performers, and it gave him an odd feeling to perceive that they were nearly all strange ones. "I am like an unrolled mummy, or Robinson Crusoe," he thought. "On the earth, but not belonging to it. I wonder what has become of Celeste and Fridoline, and poor little Rose!" And Philip sat long over his dessert, thinking of his old loves, as he sipped his wine, but looking by no means miserable.

"Eh, mon Dieu, est il possible?" burst at last from the lips of a Frenchman who was taking coffee at another table, and had been intently watching him for about half an hour. "Can I really see Monsieur Earnscliffe?" coming up to him with both hands extended.

After a second's hesitation, Philip recognized a rather silly looking young man, Monsieur Deschamps, by name, with whom he had formerly been slightly acquainted in Paris; and, glad to meet with anything that connected him with the land of the living, he cordially

returned the friendly greeting of the Frenchman.

"I am surprised that you knew me," he remarked; "half-a-dozen of my countrymen passed me to-day, with no sign of recognition."

"Until I heard you speak to one of the garçons, I was uncertain; but I could not be mistaken in the tones of your voice. My wife —I am married, now—has often said to me, 'Monsieur Earnscliffe's was the only pleasant voice she ever heard in England.'"

"I congratulate you on your fresh accession of happiness. But, have I indeed the honour of being an acquaintance of Madame Deschamp?"

"My wife's former name was Mademoiselle Celeste—"

"Celeste!" exclaimed Philip. "Do you mean—"

"Yes, monsieur, the celebrated Celeste. But she has long since abandoned the stage," he added, with dignity. "Half the year we live on our estates in Normandy, the other half in Paris; and we shall be charmed to see you *chez nous*, Hôtel Rohan, Rue St. Maur,

Faubourg St. Germain. Indeed, to-night is one of Celeste's receptions, and I am sure she will be delighted to see again so distinguished a personage as Monsieur Earnscliffe."

Philip bowed to the compliment, and stroked his beard demurely.

"After so long an absence, I should fear to intrude upon madame," he answered.

But Celeste's husband was quite sincere in repeating the invitation; and as Philip had really nothing better to do, he promised to call at the Hôtel Rohan in the course of the evening.

"You will meet several of your compatriots; for Celeste admits many strangers to her societies, in consideration of the happy years she spent abroad, especially in your country. Lady Kentish and Mrs. Dodd Tracey are of her friends the most intimate."

"Am I dreaming?" thought Philip, "or is he telling falsehoods? Poor Celeste married, and associating with reputable women, and her husband pressing me to come and see her. Things seemed to have changed since I lived in Europe!"

Monsieur Deschamps soon afterwards took

leave, having engagements of his own at the Variétés, and Philip returned to his hotel to dress.

It is an understood thing with all respectable novel readers, that the hero should never be placed in undignified positions. Truth, however, in this instance, compels the admission that Earnscliffe had no dress-coat, and was in great embarrassment as to the costume he should appear in at Celeste's. However, his beard and bronzed face accorded so well with the singularity of his dress—a braided frock-coat, made some time before at Constantinople—that when he entered the salon de reception, everyone turned to inquire from their neighbour what illustrious traveller Madame Deschamps had managed to get hold of!

It was very late when he arrived, and all the guests were long assembled. For, enjoying the freshness of the night, Philip had strolled leisurely along, and even lost his way once or twice before reaching the out-of-the-world quarter, containing the Rue St. Maur. The house of Celeste's husband was exactly such an hotel as used to be considered aristo-

cratic in 'the Faubourg'—*entre cour et jardin* —and dull, huge, and damp. It had been purchased from some ruined family by the father of Monsieur Anatole, and he considered that it gave a kind of halo of good birth to reside there himself; although poor Celeste's own taste much more warmly inclined to a cheerful, noisy apartment in the Faubourg St. Honoré.

Earnscliffe was ushered through a vestibule full of modern antique furniture, and one or two rooms lined with paintings, statues, cabinets and china—none of them first-rate, but mostly good in effect, into the pretty *salon* where Celeste was holding her 'reception;' all hung with pale blue hangings of silk, interspersed with gilding, and profusely illuminated by multitudes of wax lights, each wreathed round with flowers. Everything looked so like Celeste!

She knew him, instantly; and advanced with a blush and exclamation that were not acted, to meet him. "Oh, Philip!" in a very low voice, "this *is* unexpected!"

He told her in two words of his meeting with Monsieur Deschamps, and how gladly he had availed himself of his invitation.

"You must stop till all these people are gone," she replied, still in the same tone. "It is already late, and then we can talk over old times. But the world, and your compatriots especially, are so censorious, that I must not even appear glad to see you, now. Let me introduce you to some of your own countrypeople!"

"Celeste—madame, I should prefer looking silently at you. One well-remembered face is delightful, after years of absence!"

Celeste was very little altered; somewhat stouter, but still handsome; and her cheek as smooth and rounded as ever. No one, looking at her, could believe that she had acted for more than fifteen years! The thing most changed, was her manner. She used to be so free and unrestrained, that Philip could scarcely forbear smiling as he watched her affectation now, and the grave reserve with which she turned from him to some odd-looking Englishwoman near her, to explain 'that Mr. Earnscliffe was an old friend of her husband's!'

"Who in the world can all these people be?" thought Philip, after he had looked

about him. "They certainly look respectable."

He did not know anything of a certain class of English in Paris, or he would have felt no surprise on seeing them at Celeste's house, or anywhere else. A class made up of odds-and-ends of society—Mrs. Dodd Traceys and Lady Kentishes—who, from some little reason, are just not received in London, but manage to pass current better abroad—their followers —more reputable, perhaps, but glad to know anyone with good sounding names, and charitably deaf to evil reports concerning their leaders—other English, picked up by M. Deschamps at table d'hôtes and restaurants (and who, on their return home, would talk largely of having mixed in good French society). These—and others brought by them, and of a still more mystic origin—constituted Celeste's British guests.

Her husband—who had married her in a silly freak, or perhaps with the wish to do something remarkable—was really a man of tolerable property, though of low birth; and some of his connections—decent shopkeepers mostly—made up the French part of the com-

party, and were looked upon by the English as models of foreign breeding and high birth.

Better bred they certainly showed themselves, than his own country-people; for, when Earnscliffe's name was known, the latter all crowded round him, and solicited introductions, until he was literally bored to death. And it was with the feeling of the most intense relief that he watched the last of them—Mrs. Dodd Tracey—depart about midnight, and found himself alone among the chandeliers with Celeste.

"You have grown so handsome, Philip—I can call you so when no one hears;—but you look much older."

"You have remained handsome, Celeste, and look younger than ever."

She shook her head and smiled; but then said, her quiet life now was, of course, less wearing than it used to be when on the stage.

"And happier?"

"Oh, yes!—I was getting tired of acting and ovations and suppers, and all the rest of it. And now I have everything I like, a very nice house, as you see—only rather dull—a dear little carriage of my own, and—better

than all—a son two years old, with black eyes and long hair, beau comme un ange. I should like you to see him. But sit down—not there—here, where I can see you, and talk. I do like to hear your voice; it reminds me so of old days!"

Philip seated himself as she requested. "You must have a good deal to tell me Celeste!"

"Yes, but your story first. All that has happened to you from the very last day I saw you."

Omitting all mention of Kersaint, Philip gave her a *resumé* of his wanderings—describing just the scenes, and people she was likely to care about—and Celeste listened with great interest, and her plump hands clasped in a charming attitude of attention.

"Voilà tout!" she cried, as he finished. "Ah! and you have become quite a Philosopher among these dreadful deserts, without doubt. Mon pauvre ami, how sentimental you used to be!"

"Very long ago! I do not look sentimental now, do I?"

"Oh, no! you have quite lost that indes-

cribable expression—that softness—not of voice, that is the same as ever, but of face. All your youth is gone."

"It should be, I am getting old."

"Do not speak of it, what must I be?"

"For some people, time remains stationary."

"Ah! you never used to make pretty speeches, poor little Fridoline often said that was your great charm."

"Fridoline!" echoed Philip. "I had almost forgotten her name till to-day. Where is Fridoline? a great actress I am sure she must be by this time."

"She is gone," said Celeste, gravely. "No, not dead; but returned—vanished as she came. Some news respecting the death of a relation reached her, and she never could be induced to go on the stage again. You may imagine the rage of the manager! and that she had to pay an immense sum to get off her engagements so suddenly."

"But when did all this happen? Is she really gone—for ever."

"Oh! it happened two or three years ago. One night, just as she was going to the theatre, she got the letter; and, a week afterwards had

quitted England, accompanied by an old servant, whom you may remember. She came to see me in Paris—it was just after my marriage—looking years older, and in deep mourning. I was surprised at her coming here; for, of course, it took her out of the way in returning to Norway; but she said she had a visit to pay near Paris, before leaving France for ever. That visit was to Père la Chaise—and I accompanied her."

"Then you know more about her now than you used to do formerly?"

"I know all; and I should like you to do so too. Tenez! I had entirely forgotten it; but I have a letter for you from Fridoline herself. She gave it me, blushing and confused, the day she left; and made me promise to keep it for you, saying, 'You will see him again, or hear of him, at least—I never shall.' Do you know, monsieur Earnscliffe, I believe poor Fridoline loved you ——"

"Me, Celeste? Never. We were friends, as two young men of the same age might be—nothing more."

Celeste shook her head.

"I don't believe in these kind of friend-

ships; if, on one side, the feeling lasts as it began, it is sure to become warmer on the other. However, you shall have the letter to take home with you; when you have read that, you can judge for yourself. It is close at hand among my old letters." She rose; and, unlocking a very gaily inlaid and gilded escritoire, began to search among a disorderly mass of notes and papers. "These are my letters of the past, Philip. Nothing of the present finds its way here."

He came to her side.

"Are they too sacred for eyes profane to look?"

"Oh! *you* may have a glance. There are actually some notes of yours here, and verses that you wrote when you were a boy. Sometimes when I am 'ennuyée de bonheur,' I like to read them now. Do you remember what Victor Hugo says—

'"Plus tard de dix ans se renfermer tout un jour
Pour relire avec pleurs—"'

'"Quelques lettres d'amour.'

"I remember. The days when those notes were written do not seem so very long ago, Celeste!"

"Here is the letter, monsieur."

"I will read it to-morrow; let us speak of nothing but old times now."

And they spoke until the timepiece, just beside them, chimed two; and Madame Deschamp started at its sound, and appeared suddenly to recollect that she was no longer Celeste.

"I hope you are not leaving Paris yet?"

"A polite way of wishing me good-night, madame! You have not told me of all our mutual friends yet, or, more interesting still, half enough about yourself."

"Mais voilà Anatole qui rentre!" exclaimed Celeste, as a man's step was heard on the staircase; "and two hours of the morning!" —speaking English. "It is frightful, these Paris husbands."

Monsieur Anatole entered, and smiled affably on seeing Philip.

"Ah, Monsieur Earnscliffe! I am charmed that you have honoured us. She is looking well, is she not?" taking his wife's hand affectionately.

"Remarkably well!" answered Philip. 'I was just telling her so,' he thought, 'when

you interrupted me.' However, he was silent. There seemed such perfect harmony and good understanding in the *ménage*, he would not for worlds have disturbed it.

"I have already trespassed too much on your kindness, madame. In talking over so many old friends and scenes, I have forgotten time," he said, bowing to Celeste: "and now I must have the pain of again wishing you good-bye; only this time I trust it will be for months, not years."

"Ah, you are hastening back to England so soon!"

"Yes; I am obliged to leave to-morrow morning; but next winter I hope to return to Paris for some months, and ——"

"You will come to see us—you will count us of your friends?" said Celeste's husband, warmly seizing both his hands, and with actual tears in his eyes.

"The French are a singular people!" thought Philip, as he walked home in the moonlight to his hotel.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN he was half way between Paris and Boulogne, the following morning, Philip took Fridoline's letter from his pocket, and broke the seal. The contents were as follows:

"I shall never see you more, Monsieur Earnscliffe. When you receive this letter, my name will come back to you like a dream long forgotten. You will say, 'Ah, poor little Fridoline! I remember, now, there was something about her I never understood.' And just for this reason I write to you. In the eyes of the world I care nothing how I am remembered. I may be merely called eccentric, or classed with all other actresses; but to you—I know not why—I

would appear as I really am. The time is past when it could injure any one to disclose the secret of my life—the reason for secresy, alas! exists no longer. Philip, let me tell you briefly why I left my own country—why I followed a profession, and associated with a class, that was abhorrent to me!

"My earliest recollections are of a Norwegian village, buried in the depths of pine forests and wild mountains — where, for more than half the year, the snow never melted; and of a large, old house—a farm once, but not when I remember it—of which only a few rooms on the first-floor were furnished, and where I lived with my aunt Christina, and one servant—Hulda, who has never left me.

"My aunt was tall, and thin, and severe; and appeared to me of immense age—although I suppose, in my childhood, she could not have more than reached middle life. She loved me; but with an austere kind of love that chilled me instinctively. If I danced and sang, she shook her head, and looked away from me—when I played childish tricks upon

Hulda or the cat, she told me the devil was in my heart. Once, when I was about six years old, I collected a quantity of spring flowers in the forest, and made them into a wreath for my own hair, then climbing up to the glass in her bed-room, I was surveying myself with great satisfaction, when my aunt suddenly entered.

"'Vain already, child,' she cried passionately. 'You shall be dressed in your old winter things all the summer.' And she flung my flowers far away through the window. Afterwards, when she joined us by the kitchen stove in the evening—for I had taken refuge as usual with Hulda in my disgrace—I saw that aunt Christina's eyes were red and swollen with weeping, and I wondered where was the sin of making flower wreaths! But Hulda had told me I was too young to understand such things.

"As I grew older, I was never allowed to associate with any of the other girls in the village. People seemed to look upon us as something doubtful—my aunt held aloof from every body: so we had no visitors. I think she only received about two letters a-year, on

each of which occasions her eyes always grew red, and her manner to me redoubled in severity. If I asked, why I had no mother or father or sisters, my questions were checked so sternly, that I felt it was very wrong indeed for me to wish to be related to anyone. Still, I was not unhappy. It takes more than loneliness or occasional punishment to subdue the natural spirits and loving heart of a child. I was happy in summer, when we spent whole days in our garden, and on the borders of the little fiord close by—happy in winter, when I wandered with Hulda through the frozen forests, or listened to her wonderful sagas by the warm stove in the evenings. Hardly, as I could have believed it then, those childish days were, after all, the brightest part of my life!

"So the time went by till I was fifteen. On that day I fancied myself a woman, and I told my aunt so. 'Do you, Fridoline?' she answered. 'Then as you have decided it yourself, so it shall be. To-day your childhood ends.'

"She was right. From that day I never felt young again.

"I remember well with what interest I

seated myself by the open window on that bright June morning—eager to devour every word as it fell from the lips of aunt Christina, as she sat opposite me in her favorite stiff horse-hair chair. She told me who I was—what was my mother. Oh, Mr. Earnscliffe! I shrink from repeating it to you even now—nothing could make me do so but the feeling that my own character must always remain misunderstood unless you hear my history. Knowing also that you will not be harsh in your judgment upon her who is gone; and that, when you have read, you will burn this letter, and never allow its contents to be known to any but yourself.

"They were early left orphans—these two sisters;—but my mother was years the younger, and gifted with extraordinary beauty and talent. From the difference in age, Christina loved her almost with the love of a mother; and when, at sixteen, in spite of their religious education—in spite of all she could say against it—her young sister embraced the life of an actress, it almost broke her heart.

"The success of the lovely, gifted Pauline was instant, and in a few weeks all the young

nobles of Christiania were at her feet. Christina continued—great as was her repugnance to theatres and actors—to watch over her, even when she had to bear with harsh words for her untiring surveillance. But it was all in vain. Natural vanity—levity—*I* must call it by no harsher name—was too strong in the heart of the young actress. She became the mistress of Count Z——f—one of the richest nobles in Norway—and, by the time she was seventeen, was my mother.

"Christina had not seen her for months; but a fortnight after my birth, she called at the costly house which Count Z——f had fitted up for Pauline, and had a long interview, in which she made use of every appeal, both to affection and religion, in her endeavours to win her back. But to no avail. In the height of her youth and beauty, the voice of poor Christina had little charm to lure her from her guilty splendour and the apparent devotion of a man like Count Z——f; and she declined every proposal to leave him, and return with her sister to the country.

"'Then give me the child, at least!' said Christina. 'Let me save her innocent life

from contamination, and bring her up with a horror of all that has lost you!—far away from the world and its temptations.'

"It was some time before my mother would consent. The strongest love of humanity was not so dead within her that she could give up her helpless infant without a pang! At length, however, she yielded. Christina receiving me on the sole conditions that I should be as entirely hers as though my parents were actually dead, and that she never should be asked to receive any presents or money from my mother on my behalf.

"From that time," my aunt concluded, 'I have never seen her. She left soon afterwards for Paris, and I believe acted there for some time. Count Z——f deserted her at the end of six months. And then—but I wish to enter into no more details to you, child—enough that your mother still lives—is still guilty. You will not blame me now that I have been severe with you; and have checked all approach to that levity which was her ruin—although in any other child it might have been innocent.'

"I shrank away from her—I hid myself in

my own room—I prayed God that I might die. The whole earth seemed suddenly dark and hideous to me; and for many weeks afterwards I was dangerously ill with brain fever.

"Just as I was slowly recovering my strength, my aunt Christina died, quite suddenly, leaving me all the small property she possessed, and perfect mistress of my own actions. I do not think I felt her death much at the time, indeed, I was glad of my newly acquired freedom, for I thought it would enable me to carry out a scheme—first framed in the delirium of fever, but which I had pondered over calmly, and ripened since. To go to Paris, find out my mother, and, if the sight of her child could yet influence her, to win her from her present life.

"It was a wild idea; but yet we carried it out—I and Hulda. We travelled, and in winter, the long, long journey to Paris, and then, child as I was, I had to search for my mother, with no other clue than the address of the hôtel, where she had lived some years before. I cannot enter into the hateful details of that search—you may imagine them—but, strictly as I had been reared in a simple

cottage, ignorant of all vice, save in name, nothing daunted me, and I found her; after having been, at length, forced to communicate with the police to aid me in my search.

"She was living in splendour at the hotel of some great Russian prince; and it was with difficulty I could gain admittance to her presence. 'Madame was out'—'madame was ill'—'I was not commanded'—'I was an impostor,' and so on. However, I was not to be deterred; and after waiting about for more than two hours, I contrived to steal up the back staircase among some of the women servants, and then asked one of them to show me to madame's room, offering her five francs for her trouble. She led me along one or two passages, and then pointed to a door, saying that was the bed-room of madame, and I must knock for myself—she would incur no further responsibility.

"In my eagerness, however, I forgot to knock; and entering the room, I saw a lady, richly dressed, sitting in an immense fur-covered fauteuil by the fire, embroidering. She turned with some surprise at being interrupted; but, on seeing my pale face, and

worn black dress, doubtless thought I was one of her work-women come to solicit charity.

"'Sit down,' she said, kindly, to me, 'poor girl, and tell me what I can do for you?'

"The sound of her voice made me turn quite sick with emotion, and I could not approach a step. 'Madame,' I faltered out, 'I am Fridoline—I am your child!'

"She turned deadly pale, and for a moment I thought that she had fainted; then she started up and came to me—caught me in her arms, and kissed me—wildly—passionately. 'Fridoline, my own—my very own. Child—how have I yearned to see your face! my child—my own!' She clasped me to her breast; and, with no more words than such as I have just written, we passed two hours.

"Ah, Philip! I knew that she was a lost, stained creature; but yet, the deepest joy I have ever known was in those moments when I rested for the first time upon my mother's bosom, and felt her kisses upon my face.

"I thought, from her intense delight at seeing me, that she would at once leave Paris, and return to our quiet home with me; but with each secret visit that I paid her, this

hope died away. When at length I had courage to approach the subject, and, as delicately as a child could do, besought her to turn her thoughts to another world than this, and let me devote all my future life to hers, she evaded the question; and at length I saw —not that she was entirely without remorse, or any better aspiration—but that wealth and luxury had become part of her very existence, and were ties too strong for her to give up:— and that it was these that bound her to life. She shuddered at the mere mention of poverty, and would shed tears over my poor dress and chilled gloveless hands, when I had walked through the cold streets of an evening to see her. If I spoke of returning to Norway, she said the climate would kill her, unless she could be surrounded there with all the luxury to which she was accustomed in Paris; and once, when I was urging the question very strongly, exclaimed—'That there might be truth in all I said; but, for her part, she would much rather die at once, than have to struggle with poverty or privation.'

"Then—for the first time in my life—I wished for money, for her sake—and an in-

ward conviction told me that if I chose, I could win it by becoming an actress. As a child I had always possessed great powers of mimicry—although my aunt punished me severely in her hope of checking it—and often in the long winter evenings, when I was not more than six years old, I used to convulse poor Hulda with laughter at my representations of everybody in the village, including the pastor and aunt Christina herself. But I turned with loathing, at first, from the idea of following the same calling that had been my mother's; and only stifled my prejudice against it as the conviction gradually strengthened upon my mind, that it was the sole thing open to me in which my abilities could be brought to bear. Finally, I resolved upon making the attempt; crossed over to England—where I heard I had a better chance than in Paris—and accepted a small engagement at the French Plays—you are aware with what success.

"I begin now to think that my scheme was a false one, and that even money could not have effected what maternal love had failed in. But for years no doubt ever crossed me; and this one object kept me ever on untiring

in my profession, undismayed by difficulty, or, worse still, by all the horrors of vice that beset me. My aunt Christina, who was an extraordinary linguist herself, had taught me French and English from my infancy; and a great facility of memory made my labours less a drudgery to me than to most others. I corresponded at intervals, and by stealth, with my mother. She always wrote with the most touching affection; said how she gloried in my success, in the name I was creating; but, above all, in my fair, unspotted fame; and then there would be regrets and faint resolves of her own, soon to leave Paris for my sake. Very faint they were; but, still, enough to keep me on unwearied at my work.

"Can you now believe that *I* have never known temptation?—that I shrank with horror from the women my life threw me amongst, while yet my heart told me, that I, of all others, must say no harsh word of them?—Can you imagine how in my cottage, and garden, and flowers, I strove sometimes to forget the world and all the sin it contained?—how I shrouded even the country I came from in mystery, fearing lest any clue should be dis-

covered to my relationship with my unhappy mother? Can you believe how sweet to me, Philip, was one long summer day spent with you, when you talked to me as you would have done to a young sister of your own; and for once I dreamed of what I might have been, had I been born differently? Can you believe that that day—my nineteenth birthday—is almost the only thing to which I shall look back upon with pleasure, during the years I was an actress?

"You left England—Celeste married—and I was without a friend; but I worked more resolutely than ever, and let no vain regrets interfere with my one object. I was beginning to think that I should soon have amassed sufficient money to enable us both to live well upon in Norway, when news arrived that rendered my efforts objectless for evermore. My mother had died suddenly one night on her return from the theatre. The letter was from her own waiting-woman, the sole person who had been admitted to the secret of our relationship; and she added that my name was the last sound upon my mother's lips before she died.

"I never acted again. My life has lost its aim, now; and I shall return to my own country, unknown, unnoticed, as I left it.

"Philip—do not quite forget me.

"FRIDOLINE."

CHAPTER XI.

A VERY grand ball was to take place at the French Ambassador's, to which Marguerite was invited. Without knowing why, she was much more anxious than usual about her dress for this occasion. Her dressmaker was astonished at the number of times she changed her mind, and the numerous visits Mrs. Mortimer paid her before the day came; Mrs. Mortimer, who generally decided upon a toilette in five minutes, and never looked at it again until she wore it!

"Can you tell me the time, Mr. Mortimer? I am sure all the clocks must be slow!"

Mortimer was dozing in his arm-chair by the fire, and Marguerite, seated at one of the

drawing-room windows, was watching the last fading hues of the April twilight, and the cold-looking moon that rose among the leafless elms in the distance. They were now living in Mortimer's house, at Wimbledon—where he fancied the air agreed with him better than in London, and which Marguerite also preferred for its gardens and conservatories.

"Time—child—how you startled me! Is not the time-piece striking something?"

"It must be too slow, surely it is long past eight!"

"How anxious you are to put on your finery, Maggy. Well! I will ring for lights and coffee at once, and you can go."

"You shall not have your coffee earlier on my account, sir; there is plenty of time," replied Marguerite, a little ashamed of her own anxiety on the subject, and she came and seated herself by Mortimer's side. Her face was very flushed, and she gazed long and steadily in the fire.

"Do you believe in forebodings, sir?' she asked, suddenly.

"Eh?—how sleepy the fire makes me," returned her husband. "Believe in what, Maggy?"

"Forebodings. That when something of importance in one's life is going to occur, the mind, through some medium we are ignorant of, receives an impression of the event beforehand."

"Well! I *have* believed in dreams," answered Mortimer. "Once, years ago, as plain as possible in my sleep, I heard some one say to me, 'sell your Danish—sell your Danish,' and the impression it made on me was so great, that I did it the next morning. By Jove, Maggy, the warning was a good one, and saved me some two thousand pounds!"

"I feel, to-night," she went on, scarcely hearing this little illustration, "some unaccountable weight upon me—something almost warning me not to go to this party, much as I wish it. Shall I go, Mr. Mortimer?"

"Silly child! of course you will go. What can happen to you? the horses are as quiet as any in England. You are getting fanciful,

Maggy, you do not take exercise enough. I shall buy you a new riding horse."

But Marguerite could not shake off her fancy; not even when she was dressed and far on her way to town. It was, as she had said, a vague presentiment, not precisely amounting to a foreboding of evil, but a feeling that something was to occur that evening of no common importance. As she approached A—— House, however, the crush of carriages, the noise and excitement, took her thoughts from herself; and when she entered the brilliantly decorated rooms, amidst the blaze of countless lights, and the open admiration of every eye she met, no wonder that all gloomy thoughts vanished!

Marguerite was dressed in the palest pink, in some one of those light, floating materials that give such airy, undulating lines to the figure—looped up with bouquets of rare natural pink heath. Her hair was turned back from her brow in the style just introduced (and which requires a face like that of the French Empress, or of Marguerite, to bear it), and its dark tresses were mingled with a few immense diamonds at the back of her small, classic head.

"La belle Mortimer never looked so lovely!" said one of a knot of young men who were watching her entrance.

"I thought you were acquainted with her?" remarked a friend.

"Of course I am."

"Oh! she never bowed to you in passing, that was all."

"She is as capricious as other beauties," said the first speaker—a silly-looking youth, one of the crowds whose attempts at idle compliments, Marguerite's quiet dignity had set down. "Even the marquis is thrown over sometimes. At Lady Dacre's, the other evening, her fancy was to talk to some hideous little author the whole evening. However, he was beneath St. Leon's jealousy, I suppose."

"St. Leon is Mrs. Mortimer's cousin," said a young man, who had not yet spoken, gravely. "Of course they are intimate. But little Grot.," turning towards the youth, "is always so sharp-sighted when there is nothing to see."

A tall figure was standing close beside the group; his face turned away, but intently listening to all they said. When the last

speaker finished, they changed their position, slightly, so as to be out of hearing; and the stranger—for something about his appearance and bearing made him look unlike the London *habitués* of the room—moved on also, his eyes still following Marguerite, as she advanced to the graceful hostess.

"Are you engaged for the first contredanse, madame?"

"Gaston! you quite startled me, speaking in such a solemn tone—Monsieur, I *am* engaged for the first, but not for the second."

"You will promise it me, then?"

"Certainly; but, cousin, on our usual terms, not to dance it! Even if one cared for dancing, which I do not, who would struggle and faint through such a crowd as this for a mortal quadrille, when they might pass it coolly in some dim-lit, delicious conservatory. Look out for one, dear Gaston, you know what we both like, and above all, one with few intruders."

"She is too open!" thought St. Leon, as he watched Marguerite led away by the partner who came to claim her. "No woman on this earth ever made such a remark as that to a man she loved! And it is better so—far

better!" he added, with a half sigh. "She is happy as she is—and yet, sometimes, her blushes, her faltering answers—would it were decided, I cannot pass my life in these doubts and hopes for ever."

Like most Frenchmen, Gaston had small religious belief. No compunction as to morality, or even the ruined happiness of another, ever crossed his mind when his own wishes were concerned—his own passions to be gratified. Sensitively alive to honour, (on all points which men of the world have decided to constitute it,) he could visit daily at Mortimer's house, and receive his hospitality, with the systematic intention of one day winning Marguerite's love, and feel none of the conflicting irresolution—the agony of remorse—which, under similar circumstances, a man like Earnscliffe would have done, even, although he had not sufficient strength to fly from temptation.

St. Leon had high intellectual power, of that cold order which dazzles rather than charms; in literature he was a refined critic—in public life (as his present career has proved) a subtle and crafty diplomatist. He had a cool brain, no heart, and a temperament in which

all the fire of both parents (his mother was a Mexican) seemed united. His manner was perfect—his confidence in himself unbounded; and all these qualities, joined to his handsome person, made him irresistible with most women. Marguerite, however, saw none of his attractions as others did; and, had she had the remotest idea of his warm feelings towards herself, would have shrunk from him long ago. But she had too little vanity to guess at a passion that was not actually declared, and on her own side, their relationship—her lack of any other youthful companionship—and, above all, the 'strong necessity of loving,' which exists in every young, warm nature, had made her look upon St. Leon almost in the light of a brother.

"Voilà notre, contredanse, mon cousin!" He started as Marguerite's gay voice aroused him from a long reverie into which he had fallen—a reverie in which his secretly-cherished hopes of coming into power under the new Imperial Régime of France, and his hopes with regard to her were strangely blended. "Have you forgotten all about it, or engaged yourself to some one else? You look extremely absent."

Gaston offered her his arm without reply; but when they had left the ball-room, and were passing through the crowded vestibule, he whispered, "I *am* absent, madame—distrait—miserable; but of all others, you must pardon me, and guess the cause." And Marguerite coloured at his tone. Not with any sense of his real meaning, but with that intuitive shrinking every woman must experience at the first breath of a declaration.

"Gaston, do not be sentimental!" she answered, with a slightly forced laugh. "I always tell you that your greatest charm is in being unaffected. It would not suit you in the least to be poetic and wretched."

St. Leon led her on, through one after another of the magnificent suite of rooms that were thrown open. "Will this crowd never lessen?" he exclaimed, impatiently. "I cannot breathe to-night, I am sick of so many human faces."

"You should have employed your time, then, while I was dancing, in finding out some cool undisturbed spot, Gaston, instead of indulging your poetic fancies."

"I was thinking of you, madame; do not blame me."

The abrupt manner, the subdued tone, if it was acting, was excellent, and would have told with the majority of listeners. But Marguerite drew away.

"We have gone far enough, cousin. It is not too warm here, let us rest and admire these lovely statues. Look at that groupe of children with the rose-light from the lamp thrown over them—is it not an exquisite effect?"

"You wished to be among flowers and moonlight just now! You are changeable to-night, madame."

"Let us go on then!" she returned, gently, guessing from his face that he was offended, and too yielding ever to contest a point; "if you really wish to be away from the crowd. No one seems to be entering that door on the left—shall we try it?"

The door was closed; but yielded to Gaston's hand, and they went in. It was a small morning-room or boudoir, that, although not formally closed, had not been included among those rooms which were to be thrown open; and an alabaster hand-lamp, left, probably, by accident on a centre table, was the

only light. Gaston quickly closed the door before any other wanderers in search of quiet and cool air had discovered their retreat or attempted to follow them; and Marguerite, who otherwise would have hesitated at entering a room evidently not intended for guests, found herself thus obliged to remain, or show too plainly her unwillingness at being alone with St. Leon.

"Gaston, this quiet and repose seem almost fairy-like, after the lights and murmur of voices we have left. Had we better remain here? the room looks scarcely intended for strangers."

"Tant mieux, madame! You told me in the ball-room to select a spot free from intruders—surely this must answer the description?"

"What a bright moon!" remarked Marguerite, turning towards the window, which opened upon a balcony leading to the trellised roofs of some conservatories. "And the air does not feel cold, although it is long past midnight."

She stepped out; but hastily retreated.

"Gaston, some one is here before us. I am

sure I saw a figure at the further end of the balcony—a tall, slight figure. Cousin—let us retire, we may be intruders."

"Let me see!" St. Leon answered, springing down the steps which led from the window, and taking a hasty survey around; then quickly returning to her side. "You were deceived, Marguerite," he said, "I have looked in all directions, and no one is to be seen."

"But I am positive I saw the figure of a man."

"It may have been a servant, then," he replied, carelessly. "Some steps descend to the garden, at the further end of the conservatory. But, whoever it was, is gone now. Come in, Marguerite! the air is too cold for you to remain without."

"The calm night is so refreshing!" she answered, lingering—her eyes fixed dreamily upon the dark gardens beneath, as though she longed to pierce their shadows.

St. Leon wheeled a chair close to the window. "Sit here, then," he said, "where you can feel the air without being exposed to it."

"Thank you; that is delightful. And you, cousin."

He seated himself on a low ottoman, almost at her feet, and looked up in her face.

"Here is my place, Marguerite!"

"Nonsense, Gaston! Only imagine anyone entering, and seeing you in such a position! Although we are cousins, people would say——"

"I am listening, madame."

"Say that we were rehearsing passages from 'Romeo and Juliet, or ——"

"Do not hesitate."

"Or—that I was a coquette." He saw her blush, even in that light. "A new character for me, and one that I am not anxious to acquire."

St. Leon rose in a second. "I wish I could believe you no coquette, Marguerite."

"Gaston!"

"I repeat it—I should, indeed, be happy—wildly—tumultuously happy, if I believed that you were not a coquette."

"Cousin Gaston! do you know in the least what you are talking about to-night?"

"I know too well, madame—and it is im-

possible that you do not understand it also. No—you shall hear me!" He caught her hand as she half-rose. "I have been silent too long, and I can conceal the truth no more. That truth which you must have guessed a thousand times, Marguerite—I love you!"

"Love me!" she stammered, turning very pale. "Yes, dear Gaston—cousinly love—as a brother—"

"No, madame, not as a brother. Je vous aime"—(the conversation was in French of course)—"je vous aime d'amour."

The hand which he held turned quite cold, and he felt her tremble. "Gaston," she said quickly, "I cannot remain here, now—let me go."

"Not until you have answered me, Marguerite, ma cousine." Very gentle was his voice; he misunderstood her reply, and drew her nearer to him, but she shrank away.

"Cousin, you must not speak to me thus, never recur to it again—let us be friends, as we have been. I—I—"

"Marguerite," he interrupted, "tell me, honestly and plainly, do you love me? Of your scruples, your remorse, your fears, I

have no wish to be told. I can imagine them; but tell me, with all the truth of your nature, do you love me?"

"As a friend?"

"No, madam; as a lover?"

"No—a thousand times no." She took her hand away, and looked him very full in the face.

"Then you have trifled with me cruelly—trifled with me as I could not have believed you capable of doing, with your youth, and your seeming innocence."

"I do not understand you, monsieur!" Even her soft temper was aroused by his bitter manner, and the sneer which accompanied his last word. "How have I ever trifled with you?" she cried.

"Marguerite, can you recall no time when your voice has suddenly lowered as you spoke to me—when your cheek has flushed, your eyes have sank beneath mine? Have you never started at my voice? Oh, Marguerite!" he went on, his tone growing low and agitated with these recollections. "It could not all be acting; speak—tell me, that although I may hope for nothing more, there *have*, at least, been moments when you loved me.

Tell me only this one word. Even now you are pale—you tremble."

Marguerite's head had sunk as she listened to him, until he could only see the averted line of her profile, and her hands were clasped together, nervously. A sudden self-reproach shot through her at Gaston's words; and, in her lowliness of self-estimation, she at once transferred the guilt of his love to herself.

"I have deceived him," she thought. "When the likeness to Philip has made me blush and tremble against my own conviction, he has thought it love for him! Yet, how can I undeceive him?"

With cheeks now burning with shame, she looked up timidly in her cousin's face. "Gaston, I *have* unconsciously deceived you," she whispered. "Nay, do not misunderstand me—not as you think I have. Cousin, there is some one without, I know I heard a step—"

"No—no, it is nothing. Go on, Marguerite, all my hopes in life hang upon your next words!"

"I have, Gaston, never loved you; but, early in life," she lowered her voice, and

glanced hurriedly towards the open window, "long before I was married, I parted with one dear to me; one whom I have never met since—shall never see again—and, oh, Gaston! how must I tell you? there is a likeness in your features. At times you have so reminded me—and—"

"Madame!" interrupted the marquis, with the most frigid politeness, "I beg of you not to be so discountenanced. It is no unusual occurrence. Most English young ladies have loved before they marry; and with me your secret—such as it is—is perfectly safe. Only, another time, when you may trace any fancied resemblance in one of your friends to this—early lover, it might be well to explain the circumstance at once; before so many blushes, and starts, and tremours have led him into being the fool that I am. You have honoured me with your regard from my likeness to another! I thank you, madame!"

"Gaston—you are unjust!"

"I love—and I have been deceived. You cannot enter into my feelings."

"And I have been wrong—so wrong," her voice faltering, "But let my ignorance

of the world be my excuse. If I could have guessed in the slightest degree your feeling toward me, cousin, I would have died sooner than mislead you on such a subject. I have few real friends—no relation but you, and now I have offended you for ever. Oh, be generous enough to forgive me!"

Her meekness, and the utter absence of all reproof to him, touched St. Leon, and disarmed the bitter words that were about to come from his lips. But no man bears well the rejection of his love—especially under an explanation so galling to pride as that which Marguerite had just offered; and he turned away with an assumption of indifference that ill accorded with his agitated face.

"I can never think of you, Marguerite, but as an image of everything most sweet and lovely —never recall even this evening without remembering your gentleness, your absence of all that hard self-approval which so many women look upon as virtue—when they are not tempted. But we cannot continue friends; I have hopes and ambitions in France, in which I shall, doubtless, be able to forget the dream of the past year. Nothing but that dream

would have kept me so long in England! After to-night, we shall meet no more."

The tears rose in her eyes; but she was silent. She could not *now* ask him to be her friend still, or oppose his intention of leaving England.

"Shall I conduct you to the ball-room, madame?" offering her his arm with just his usual manner, and seeking to banish from his voice all traces of recent emotion. "Your absence may be noticed; and, I believe, I am engaged for the next dance."

"Then go—pray go—and leave me here until it is over! I am so flushed—so agitated yet—it will be well for me to remain quite alone for half an hour. No one will enter to disturb me; and, in such a crowd, I shall not be missed."

He left her, without another word; and Marguerite remained alone—alone in her beauty, and youth, and brilliancy, but with tearful eyes, and a feverish weight about her heart, more even than her rejection of Gaston was sufficient to occasion. In hearing words of love once more—although her heart no longer beat to them—the past

seemed to have arisen again. These long cold years of separation rolled away: her youthful passion, her glowing Kersaint life returned. She thought of the first hour when her heart acknowledged its love for Earnscliffe: of the day when they had parted—the promises she gave him then——

"Philip!" she murmured, half aloud, "I *have* been true to you—I have loved no other."

"Marguerite," answered a low voice, very softly, but whose tone made her whole blood rush wildly to her heart. She looked up, and close before her stood Earnscliffe.

CHAPTER XII.

On his arrival in London, Philip met with a much warmer reception among his old friends than he had anticipated. Small jealousies, petty rivalries, are forgotten in five years; and, with our natural proneness towards the past, men remember only the brighter side of youthful friendships, and imagine they were infinitely warmer than was in reality the case.

He went straight to his uncle's house when he arrived; and the intense delight of the old man in once more seeing his boy, rewarded Philip sufficiently for his intention of making England henceforth his home.

"I shall leave you no more, sir," he said, when they were sitting in their old places,

after dinner—just the same places in which he had read his first work to Miles—"I have travelled enough."

"I suppose so, Phil.! and found out for yourself what I could have told you before you started—that there is no place like England."

"I have seen enough of the institutions of other countries to be conscious of our superiority where it exists, and of our demerits also. Without desiring to change our constitution for the despotic rule of Vienna or Paris, no man can have lived in either country without wishing that the same excellence, in all administrative departments, existed in England."

"Ah, of course! At least it is the fashion to say so; but we forget that, while our newspapers speak the truth, and make things out worse than they are in the desire for reform, *they* have a miserable mutilated press, whose writers have always—not the popular opinion, but the fear of imprisonment, before their eyes. However, naturally, you are of your time, Philip. I should like to see you in Parliament, and settled in the position your abilities must command before I die."

"You are looking well, sir—not a day older than when I left."

"Yes, I am well, thank'ee. However, if you're getting on in life, when I die, your children will enjoy what I have to leave. I suppose you will marry again, nephew?".

"Thank you; my wishes do not lie in that direction. I have had quite enough of the holy state."

"Scoff at nothing, Phil. No one scoffs now. When you are in Parliament, you must profess decided church opinions; either attend St. Barnabas, and put down your name to subscriptions for building Catholic cathedrals; or lay the stones of Dissenting chapels, and establish Evangelical penitentiaries for milliners' apprentices. Whatever else may be changed, you will find that cant grows and flourishes as heartily as ever. But, to return to yourself—what are you writing?—or are you writing anything now?"

"Nothing; and I shall be idle for six months longer, at least. After Arabian deserts, however sweet in romance, I can assure you one returns with some zest to human beings. It will be so new to find myself a frequenter of clubs and operas!"

"Don't expeet to be a lion, though. Those Crimean fellows take up so much attention with their beards and their medals, the women have no eyes for anything else."

In spite of Miles's prediction, Earnscliffe was soon overwhelmed with invitations, and the soft eyes of many a young *débutante* looked kindly at him wherever he appeared. For he was now again eligible —the heir to Miles's not inconsiderable property (which the old man's good management and economical habits had greatly increased siuce the time of his failure); and, last of all, handsomer than ever, and with just such an amount of scandal connected with his name as serves to give additional interest to a man in the eyes of young ladies.

He never thought of meeting Marguerite. The name of her husband had escaped from his memory, or whether they even lived in London; and when, at the club, he heard the perfections of the lovely Mrs. Mortimer described, and a sketch of her progress in society was given him, he little knew that it was of his Marguerite they spoke.

"She is as lovely as an angel, and as fault-

less," said one of his friends; "far too excellent for my taste! However, you will see her at A—— House this evening, and you can judge for yourself; perhaps she may be in your style."

"As I do not know what that is, I cannot answer. I generally look devoutly at every fair face I meet, and forget it in five minutes! When men reach my age, they are past enthusiasm about beauty."

"Especially when they expend as much upon it in their youth as you have done! But I am rather inclined to believe that a man is never more ready for a 'grande passion' than when he has just spent two years among deserts. The lull which succeeds the fiery turmoil of young loves, is generally followed in its turn by some attachment far deeper than all the early ones put together."

When Marguerite entered the salons of the Comtesse De P—— that evening, amidst the murmurs that her appearance always excited, Earnscliffe saw, and recognized, her in a moment. His astonishment may be conceived on meeting Marguerite St. John in the celebrated Mrs. Mortimer, and beholding into

what glorious beauty her girlish promise had ripened; and an emotion, of which an hour before he would not have believed himself capable, smote his heart as he thought of all he had *once* been to her; and how completely the world and her success must now have effaced him from her memory.

He observed her meeting with St. Leon; and, in her free, unconstrained manner, saw that there, at least, he had no rival, although—with the jealous quickness of a lover—he read, at once, on the face of the marquis, that his were more than the ordinary attentions which every one pays to a lovely woman.

"She may not care for *him*!" thought Philip; "but to how much devotion like his must she have been exposed! Fair though her fame is, among all the men in London who are at her feet, is it possible that no new fancy has sullied the old love?"

He had next to watch Marguerite as she danced with some young Austrian officer, to whom she had been just introduced, and to mark her smiling, animated manner during the whole quadrille. Then to see St. Leon approach again, and Marguerite take his arm, with an air of

the most complete intimacy; laughing merrily as she told him of his solemn manner.

"She has become a coquette—she is like all other women, now!" thought Mr. Earnscliffe, fiercely. "How I detest this hot throng of people!" and he walked away from the ball-room, and from Marguerite. Chance led him to the boudoir, already mentioned; and the fresh, bright night, tempted him into the garden, without; where he paced hurriedly up and down, thinking over this sudden meeting with his old love, and the emotions that the sight of her had awakened. "I laughed at it all, this morning," he thought, "and said that men of my age could not feel the passion of boys; yet, my heart has beat more wildly at meeting Marguerite, than it did years ago when she first said she loved me; more than her's would now, I imagine, on seeing me. Our characters are changed, from what they were in the Kersaint days! Marguerite is a woman of the world; and I shrink and tremble—but this is folly." He stopped short in his walk, and turned again towards the house, "I will return, and ask to be introduced to Mrs. Mortimer. If

she treats me as an ordinary acquaintance, or feigns altogether to forget old times—let it be so! I will not wound her pride or disturb her composure by recalling them."

So he retraced his steps; and was about to enter the window, when he heard the sound of voices in low, eager conversation; and paused, as one instinctively does on interrupting an interview of this nature. His first thought was to withdraw as he came, and find another entrance to the house; but as he noiselessly turned with this intention, he caught the agitated words of Marguerite—"Gaston, I have unwillingly deceived you;" and he knew in a second that it was her voice.

Fastidious, almost to a fault, on smaller points of honour, Earnscliffe would not have stooped to listen even had his own dearest interest being concerned; but he was literally so spell-bound by Marguerite's voice, that it was some minutes before he could reflect upon his position, and that he was overhearing a conversation never meant for other ears. And in that time he had learnt all—her rejection of Gaston

—the meek acknowledgement of her old girlish love—the half-confession that that love still lingered.

"Unchanged!" he thought. "And still so gentle—so utterly distrustful of herself. Oh, Marguerite! that I could claim you for my own at last."

He waited until St. Leon had gone, then silently advanced and gazed on her subdued mournful attitude—her drooping head; scarcely breathing, lest the sound should disturb her. But when even alone his name still was on her lips, he could remain silent no longer.

"Marguerite!"

She looked up—she knew him. To his last hour that expression of her face will never fade from Earnscliffe's memory. Delight—pure passionate delight—like that of a mother welcoming back the child she had believed dead to her, shone in every mobile feature. No dread of consequence—no recollection of their altered position—that still they must be as nothing to each other—was there! She saw him—heard his voice again!

"My Philip!" Oh! not worlds of protesta-

tion could have told him the truth, the unaltered truth of Marguerite, like that simple exclamation. She clasped his hands—looked up into his face, with the eager gaze of one recalling every line of the well-known features. "Philip—Philip!"

It seemed such exquisite happiness to speak that one word 'Philip!' No other rose to her lips amid all the bewildering thoughts that strove for utterance.

"Marguerite—Mrs. Mortimer!"

He was the first to recall anything of the present to her mind; and Marguerite unclasped his hands and drew slightly back.

"It is so sudden!" she said, faintly. "Forgive me. I forgot everything—but seeing you again—imagine my surprise—"

"Imagine mine—on discovering that the celebrated beauty of all London was Marguerite St. John."

Both spoke somewhat abruptly, and with the hurried intonation of deep excitement; then, after a few seconds, they began to speak on indifferent subjects—as those always speak who meet like this, yet dare not give expression to their real thoughts. Marguerite asked

how long he had been in England; Earnscliffe enquired politely after her husband. But, even as they spoke, the eyes of each sought the other, each felt that, under that assumed calm, lay worlds of passionate joy at meeting —thoughts of that tender past which every look and word recalled.

"You are so changed, Phil—Mr. Earnscliffe."

"Yet you knew me instantly."

"I knew your voice—but of course *I* should have recognized you anywhere, at any time. You look older, Philip," (his name would come) "scarcely so grave though as you used to be. Ah!—you where so pale when—when I last parted from you."

"I am only outwardly changed, Mrs. Mortimer.

The colour mounted in her cheek at his tone. Again, for the first time in five years, a voice could make her pulse thrill—her blood ebb tumultuously—as she listened! Again she was on the threshold of that paradise, where alas! it was still forbidden for *her* to enter.

"Only outwardly changed!" She looked

up into his face as he bent towards her, and thought till this moment she had never seen the perfection of human expression before. How could she ever have called Gaston like him?—Gaston—Mr. Mortimer. With a sudden flash of thought, Marguerite remembered her husband—her home, and her gloomy forebodings of that evening before she started, and all the brightness of her dream faded.

"It is getting so late," she hesitated. "I think I shall soon leave."

"So soon?—After five years of separation, can you not spare me one half hour? Mrs Mortimer, I have much to hear."

"Perhaps," hesitating still more, "you would call upon us. I am sure Mr. Mortimer would be glad to see you, and——"

"And you? Do *you* really wish me to come?"

"Oh, Philip! can you ask?"

The caressing tone and quick upward look, were so exactly Marguerite in her old girlish days, that Earnscliffe almost started. Her general manner had, of course, acquired something of the conventional tone of the world; but, at this moment, she looked as childlike as

on that first morning when she ran beside him on the sea-shore.

"How shall I ever remember to call you by your new name?" he whispered, as they returned towards the ball-room; and Marguerite's cheeks were yet glowing with the blush this remark called forth, when they entered.

St. Leon saw them instantly. He was not dancing—indeed, his engagement had been only a pretext for leaving her—but was standing silent, and alone, moodily thinking over the blow his vanity, and such love as he was capable of, had received. A fierce pang of jealousy shot through him as he saw Philip.

"Who is that stranger with Mrs. Mortimer?" he asked of an acquaintance near him.

"The little man with red hair, that she is speaking to?—he is ——"

"Bah! the man on whose arm she leans."

"That? eh, mon cher! is it possible you do not recognize Earnscliffe, the writer—just returned from the East? You have been told a hundred times that you are like him—judge for yourself, if you are satisfied with your

original. Mrs. Mortimer looks more animated than usual. It is not often celebrities take to each other so well!"

Gaston moved impatiently away; he guessed, by one of those intuitions peculiar to persons of his subtle nature, that he was looking at Marguerite's old lover; guessed it by Philip's quiet manner—by her face: and the casual remark upon the likeness between himself and Earnscliffe confirmed this suspicion, while it recalled, with fresh bitterness, the error into which he had fallen in believing that Marguerite loved him.

"She shall, at least, not have the triumph of seeing me again," he thought. But, while passing through the crowd in his attempt to leave the room, he was thrown, unwillingly, quite close to them. Marguerite did not see him; she was answering some remark of Earnscliffe's, her face upturned to his; her eyes sparkling; and her whole manner lit up with unusual animation. Gaston watched them for a few seconds with set lips; then a smile crossed his face.

"She loves him still," he thought. "Poor little fool! and will call it friendship. Celui là me venger de son indifference!"

CHAPTER XIII.

It was very late when Marguerite reached home, and the few hours intervening between her arrival and Mortimer's early breakfast were spent, not in sleep, but in agitated reveries over her meeting with Philip, and anxious endeavours to form some right plan for the future. She would tell her husband at all events—her truthful nature forbade concealment for a second. "Mr. Mortimer understands the world better than I do," she thought. "He will decide upon what terms I ought to meet Philip now—how great should be our intimacy." Marguerite knew not that, after all that was past, and married now to a man she only regarded in the light of a kind bene-

factor, she had but one safe-guard—to see Earnscliffe no more.

"Did you enjoy your ball as much as you expected, Marguerite?" said Mortimer at the breakfast-table, glancing up from the newspaper. "Lord child! how pale you look. I shall be glad when all these dissipations are over, and I can take you off quietly to the seaside."

"I am more tired than usual to-day; there was so much excitement last night—I mean." She grew nervous, and began to stir her untasted coffee. "I met—"

Mortimer, however, was not listening. He was particularly engaged in reading the City Article, and, much as he loved Marguerite's voice, would just as soon it had been silent at that moment.

"I have something to tell you, sir!" with sudden energy.

"Indeed, my dear!" very unwillingly looking up from his paper, and keeping his fore-finger on the spot where he left off. "What do you want now, little wife? wasn't your dress fine enough?"

Something in his manner so utterly forbade

the delicate confidence she was about to make, that all Marguerite's courage forsook her; and scarcely knowing what she said, she turned abruptly to another subject.

"Cousin Gaston is going to France, Mr. Mortimer."

"The best place for him too. He has been discontented and out of humour for months past. He will get into place under the Emperor, no doubt;—staunch loyalist though he used to be! A Frenchman's politics can always turn round at a day's notice. When is he coming to say good-bye?"

"I don't know, sir—perhaps not at all—I said something to him last night which he did not like I am afraid." Marguerite quite regained her composure in speaking of Gaston.

"Um! I can imagine what it was. He has been hovering about you too long, even for a cousin. These young Frenchmen have not our feelings upon honour and good faith. Is this the news then? 'Cousin Gaston's' departure?'"

With a burning blush, Marguerite forced herself, at length, to bring out Philip's name. 'She had met an old friend—a friend of her father's—Mr. Earnscliffe—the author.'

"Indeed, child! I never knew your father had any English friends since you were born. However, I am glad you have met some one to talk over old times with. Just let me finish my city news, and you shall tell me all about him."

The utter unsuspicion of her husband made Marguerite's task more difficult to perform. She sat watching his face as he read, and wondering how, with his strict, almost stern ideas upon such points, he would receive the intelligence, that years ago—as a mere child—*his* wife had had a lover—a married man too, even then—and that she had now met him again in the world!

It was a fatal error, that before she married she never told the secret of her life to Mortimer. Had she done so, in all frankness, explaining to him the exact extent of her intimacy with Earnscliffe, that, ignorant of his marriage, she had loved him, that now she would strive to blot out his recollection for ever, he might have overlooked it. At least he could have judged for himself whether he chose to accept such poor dregs of love as were hers to offer! But, in her timidity—

her extreme youth—her absence of all maternal council—she shrunk from such an avowal as this; and he had made her his wife, in the full confidence that *he*, at least, possessed an affection never yet shared by another man.

"Shadbrook Brothers, by Jove!" exclaimed Mortimer, with a vigorous descent of his large hand upon the table, which made the Sèvres breakfast-service start from its aristocratic composure. "I said it—I knew it—for days past, and no one believed me! Gone—aye! to everlasting smash—they will not pay a shilling in the pound, and I was fool enough to keep one of their bills against my own conviction. I beg your pardon, Marguerite! but I must start for town at once. Thank God! it's only for a thousand pounds; but poor M——s will be let in for half he is worth. Ring the bell, my dear—don't you see that I am in a hurry?"

Marguerite shrank aside as Mortimer—his red face all flurried with the news of Messrs. Shadbrook Brothers' failure—bustled from the room. He forgot to say good-bye to her, even, in his excitement; and, five minutes after-

wards, she heard the carriage roll off that took him to the city.

And so ended her attempted confidence respecting her old lover. She had not the courage to attempt the subject again. And Mortimer never knew how far more important to him were the trembling words that hung impending on Marguerite's lips that morning than any city failure could have been—even though it involved the loss of a thousand-pound bill!

Earnscliffe's last words, the night before, were—"Then, to-morrow, I may call, if you will allow it;" and Marguerite passed all the forenoon in a feverish, unsettled state of excitement, expecting him; half regretting, at one moment, that she had not spoken to Mortimer —then glad, poor child! that she had been silent—that once, at least, she was to have the exquisite happiness of being again with Philip!

She wandered from room to room, unable to employ herself. She could not read; she could not work. She went into the conservatories, and even her flowers did not interest her; so she returned to the room she called her own, where all her father's old books were

collected, and seated herself patiently by the window, to watch for his approach. Exactly as the clock beside her chimed two—the hour appointed—she saw the gates of the lodge open, and Earnscliffe rode in. He always looked well on horseback; and, as Marguerite watched him approach the house, involuntarily her heart contrasted his graceful, noble air with her husband, as she had last seen him. She crushed the thought in a second; but it had had birth, and no such thought can ever utterly die.

Philip was shown into Marguerite's morning room, where she usually received visitors; and, after a few minutes' pause, to recover her composure, she joined him.

She was dressed in white, with a large knot of pale blue ribbon at her throat, and looked much younger than she had done in her dress and diamonds the evening before—looked so exactly the little Marguerite of Kersaint, that Philip could not refrain from exclaiming, as she entered—

"Are the last five years more than a dream, Marguerite? I cannot believe when I look at you, that they are past by in reality!"

a summer night, and I saw the pebbles, wet with the spray from the sea, as they lay in the moonlight. They all looked like gems and pearls, and I filled my frock with them, and took them home. When I woke early next morning, my treasures were only dull, common stones. Just so are my triumphs now. They sparkle at the time; but by the next morning their charm is gone!"

"I remember once you told me that you could never feel ambition for yourself?"

"I never should if—oh! it is useless to speak of these things, life flows so differently to the way one dreamed of; and circumstances change our very nature. But I am happy," she added, with a sort of effort; "Mr. Mortimer is so kind; I have everything I can desire—and—and he was my friend when every one else turned from me."

"You have a nice place here," remarked Philip, rather abruptly. "Do you prefer it to London?"

"Yes; and my husband thinks it better for his health. Sometimes we spend a few weeks in his house in Portland Place; but we always gladly return here; and then, during

tions are as nothing with most people. Those, only, who possess a peculiarly happy organization can forget."

"Happy!" she turned her full gaze on his face. "Happy! my life would be utterly barren if there were no past."

"In the world—in society—who thinks of it?"

"In the world—in society? But what is *that* out of one's existence? In the early morning—of a summer's evening—of a winter's night—oh, Philip! in all the times that make up our real life, the past is everything. It is the poetry of the present."

"To old people it may be so; but with the young, all golden dreams lie in the future."

"Ah! I spoke only for myself," returned Marguerite, sadly. "I never look onward."

There was a moment's silence; then Earnscliffe resumed. "But why talk of past or future? With your beauty, your success in the world—the adoration you receive, the present is everything. Surely all your brilliant triumphs bring you happiness?"

"Philip! once, when I was a very young child, Manon took me out upon the beach on

a summer night, and I saw the pebbles, wet with the spray from the sea, as they lay in the moonlight. They all looked like gems and pearls, and I filled my frock with them, and took them home. When I woke early next morning, my treasures were only dull, common stones. Just so are my triumphs now. They sparkle at the time; but by the next morning their charm is gone!"

"I remember once you told me that you could never feel ambition for yourself?"

"I never should if—oh! it is useless to speak of these things, life flows so differently to the way one dreamed of; and circumstances change our very nature. But I am happy," she added, with a sort of effort; "Mr. Mortimer is so kind; I have everything I can desire—and—and he was my friend when every one else turned from me."

"You have a nice place here," remarked Philip, rather abruptly. "Do you prefer it to London?"

"Yes; and my husband thinks it better for his health. Sometimes we spend a few weeks in his house in Portland Place; but we always gladly return here; and then, during

the autumn, we generally go to the sea-side. Will you let me show you my garden? There is one part of it I should like you to see, although it is too early in the season for it to look to perfection."

She rose, and opened the door of a glass alcove, leading into an immense conservatory, where tier rose above tier of the rarest hot-house plants—all grouped and arranged by one of the first gardeners in England. Philip glanced at them coldly. These evidences of Mortimer's wealth were not likely to afford him pleasure.

"You must excuse enthusiasm, Mrs. Mortimer. I understand nothing of rare plants."

"Like me." she answered. "Of course one admires all beautiful flowers for their beauty, but these have no interest—they want association. Come, and I will show you my favourite spot, planned and executed by me; and where gardeners do not intrude."

They walked to some distance in the grounds, and reached a thick plantation of young trees—larch, fir, and oak—but only of a few years' growth.

"You must take these poor shrubs as re-

presentations of our giants in the Breton forests," said Marguerite; "I was obliged to be content with the only trees the place produces."

She led him through a winding path, for some yards; and, then, turning round, said—

"This is my miniature of the forest lake at home, where the water-lilies grew. Do you remember it, or see any resemblance?"

It was a clear pool of water, artificial, of course, but natural enough in appearance—ferns and water-plants were planted round it, all of the same kinds as really grew in Brittany; and a profusion of water-lilies, not yet in flower, floated on the surface.

"I remember well," said Philip; "it was our first walk together."

[Oh! dangerous conversations, when every sentence commences with, 'I remember!'] They stayed long by the little lake, talking of old days—old scenes—but both tacitly avoiding all allusion to their last parting, or anything that had happened since then.

"Poor Bello was with us that day by the lake!" said Marguerite. "I fancy now that I can see him darting off into the forest for game. Do you recollect him?"

"Perfectly well; is he still living?"

"No; he died about a year ago. I grieved for his death more than I should have thought it possible to grieve for an animal. But then he was all that remained to me of my home; and he was so faithfully attached to me, up to the very last."

"And your home—Kersaint—who has it now?"

"Mr. Mortimer would not let it be sold, when he saw how much I cared for it. Manon lives there with poor, half-witted Bruno. She writes me a strange letter twice a year—quite her own in style and orthography—but full of affection and all the simple news that she knows I care for—about the peasants and the garden. Yes! Kersaint is still mine. We have often talked of making an excursion there; and I do think this summer Mr. Mortimer will take me. Poor Manon! can you not imagine her wild delight?—but you look so very thoughtful, Mr. Earnscliffe—what are you dreaming about?"

"I was thinking what a happy man your husband must be—able to forestall every wish of yours, and read the pleasure in your face for his reward!"

"I believe Mr. Mortimer is happy," she answered; "most kind and generous I know that he is. But tell me,"—seeing the clouded expression still upon his face—"does this mimic lake really remind you of our forests—of Brittany?"

"Yes; I am only too much reminded," said Philip, "of things that it would be far better to forget."

"Yet you have seen so much since, I wonder that you can have such a good recollection of poor Kersaint! You have been everywhere — Vienna, Rome, Jerusalem, Thebes—while I have seen nothing but London, and a few watering-places, all these years. Which place—I mean which city—that you have visited, would you like to live in best?"

"Rome. At least it suited my mood best at that time; and my friend, Neville, was with me there. But," added Philip, looking steadily at her, "my recollections of Rome are bitter ones—for it was at Rome I first heard of—your marriage!"

Marguerite turned away, and plucked tiny pieces from the grass beside her very quickly.

"You must have been surprised," she said, in a low voice.

"It was very soon, that was all. I expected it would be so, after a lapse of time —but—it *was* soon, Marguerite."

"I—I—should have written; but I did not know where to send my letter. I did not want you to hear of it first through the papers, without any explanation. I should have liked you to know all the circumstances, and how very unhappy the life was that I left, when I married!"

"You acted perfectly wisely, of course. My feelings, I confess, were intensely selfish ones. I ought to have been glad to hear that you had again a home and protector, but—I could not feel so. As I said, my recollections of Rome are bitter ones! In ten days after hearing of your marriage, I left it for ever."

"For ever? shall you not, at some future time return to Italy? I cannot imagine your living long in England."

"Well—I cannot imagine myself living long anywhere. I am so accustomed to change and unquiet that—however, I shall now have

different objects in England to those that I have had before. Perhaps, they may fill the void of life better than any of the former ones!"

"Do you care much for going to the opera, now? Oh! how you used to tell me about it, and how vainly I tried to picture it all. It is my greatest amusement—my *real* pleasure."

"Then I am sure I shall care for it," answered Philip. "But I have forgotten all about operas, of late years, Do you remember how I told you once that your voice only wanted cultivation, to be the first in England? I was right, you see—I have heard of your renown."

"Yes—I sing well, I know; but my singing does not give me greater pleasure than when I could not tell a note, and sang only wild ballads to my father—"

"And to me. I remember well the first evening I ever heard you sing to the guitar —with the sunset falling on your face through the open window, and I thought it was the face of the Madonna, out of some old painting. Have you quite forgotten?"

"And how you stole away afterwards, and

I watched you pacing up and down the terrace, in the twilight! Generally, I ran after you—myself, I remember, in those long summer evenings. Oh! Mr. Earnscliffe, what must you have thought? I was so free in manner—so very different to what I now know is correct for young ladies to be."

"Shall I tell you what I thought?"

"No—no—it would only be a compliment."

"Of which you hear so many, that you are tired?"

"Of them, and the people that pay them too. It is so delightful to speak again to some one who is a real friend, and with whom one can talk of subjects of greater interest than people and parties, and all the thousand-times-repeated nothings which form common conversation."

"But, surely, you have some friends who do not come under such general denunciation?"

"Very few. None—with perhaps one exception, that I can call a friend."

"And that exception?"

"Well, I think Lady Millicent Gore, cares for me more than anyone else."

"And the marquis de St. Leon?"

"Cousin Gaston? Oh yes; he and I were great friends. But he is not like you—he is conventional, and never can see things quite as I do. Whenever I think that we are just agreeing well, something he says will jar upon my feelings, and make me see that, though we speak the same language, he does not understand what I say. Still—I have liked Gaston—the tie of relationship is something in itself, and it was so unexpected to meet with a relation of my mother's, that my heart warmed towards him from the first. But he is leaving England for good—now; and—"

"You will miss him extremely, I suppose, Mrs. Mortimer?"

"No—I mean it is better Gaston should go—that is—Mr. Earnscliffe! an idea is flashing upon me." Marguerite's cheek became crimson, and a whole forest of tiny leaves were soon lying upon her white dress. "Last night, when you found me alone—had you heard?—did you hear Gaston's voice?"

"Most unwillingly," replied Philip, I must

confess that I heard some of a conversation not intended for other ears. Something I heard before I had time to withdraw; then, I caught the tone of your voice, and forgot everything else in listening to that again!"

"And you heard —— tell me! I would rather know!" cried Marguerite, in her generosity only thinking of Gaston's secret—"tell me what you heard him say."

"I scarcely heard the voice of your companion, and have not the faintest recollection of his words. I thought of nothing but your voice."

"That is right. Gaston would not have liked a stranger to hear what he was speaking about. His political career in France is just opening to him, and we were talking of things important to him, and ——"

"Not to you?"

She looked up quickly, and saw from the expression of his face that he had heard enough to guess the nature of their interview; and her eyes sank with shame as she recollected that her own last words contained the confession of her former love.

"I have forgotten all about it," she stammered. "Let us speak of something else."

How lovely she looked at this moment! resting in an attitude of the most excessive grace upon the turf-bank where they were sitting together—her face turned half-aside—her eyes downcast, unconsciously pulling to pieces the petals of some daisies that she had plucked. They would have made a good study, thus, for a picture of Faust and Gretchen!—She, with her timid, girlish manner, and Philip, with his intellectual, noble face, and eyes intently fixed upon his companion.

"Your own flower, wild-Marguerite! Will you not give me one now—out of all your English riches—as you used to do in bygone times?"

"No—I was a child then. Children may give or say anything. I will give you this piece of jessamine," taking it from her waist-belt; "it is a very early and rare kind, and much better worth having than my poor namesake. But I must confess I prefer all wild flowers, however common."

"Do you remember our lesson in bouquet-making?" said Philip, approaching nearer to receive the flower, "that bright May morning? and how you told me ——"

And so on, with those endless recollections and replies—so tiring for other people—so intensely interesting to those concerned—until the slanting sun warned Marguerite that the afternoon was quickly passing.

"I must show you the library and the old books!" she cried, as she rose; "I had no idea the time had passed so quickly."

"And I have kept you out in this cold east wind," replied Philip, as they walked slowly towards the house. "You are much too thinly clad for our wretched English spring."

"I never wear a bonnet. It was part of my education, you must remember, to brave all weathers; and England has a better climate than Brittany ——"

"By comparison, perhaps. I hate all these northern climates, after the warm south, where every breath one draws is an actual enjoyment, and life flows on so sweetly one does not know that it is indeed passing."

"Yet you have left this delicious climate?" observed Marguerite, smiling.

"I was alone in Italy, Mrs. Mortimer; I rather spoke of what life might be there,

than of what mine actually was. Alone, existence is much the same everywhere."

Marguerite did not answer; and, entering the house together, she led Earnscliffe upstairs into her little library. The oak pannelling—the plain book-shelves—the trellised windows—all were in exact imitation of her father's library at Kersaint; and his own books, with a few of Marguerite's favourites, were on the shelves.

"In this room my indoor-life is passed," she said. "I read here for hours every day. Take this seat—no—not where you can look out and see the difference between Wimbledon Common and the green sea at home—but here, turned towards the fire-place—and now, fancy yourself at Kersaint!"

"May I, indeed, do so?" was Philip's reply, and the blood rose crimson in Marguerite's cheek at the tone. It was in the library she had told him that, whatever happened, she would never love any other but him; and she felt that the whole scene must return upon his recollection.

"I did not mean—Oh Philip! I can keep up this appearance no longer," she exclaimed,

passionately. "Let us speak once of old days, and then—be silent for ever! Remember how young I was—how ignorant of the world—!"

"Marguerite!" interrupted Philip, rising and taking her hand, his own trembling as it met hers. "Do not speak as though the past contained anything you could wish forgotten. If there was wrong, it was my own; if there should be remorse, it is for me. You have always been as you are now—most pure—most blameless."

"But Philip! hear me; for this once I must speak. You know how—then—I loved you," the words came reluctantly from her lips, "and when we talk so much of old times, it recalls old feelings to my heart, that *should* have died long ago; and it is wrong, for I am married now—married to one whom I respect more than all on earth, and I must not have a thought apart from him. Will you help me in not recurring to the past? I am weak still, you see—and I look to you for assistance!"

She spoke quickly, nervously, and changed colour every moment. Ignorant that she was

betraying to Earnscliffe—that which a woman of the world would have hid from her own heart namely, that his influence over her was as powerful as ever, she said simply what she believed it was her duty to say; hoping that, having done so in this first interview, their future intercourse would be placed upon a right footing.

"Help me Philip in not recurring vainly to the past, or wishing any part of life undone. We have both so much to make us happy still —you in your genius and ambition—and I—"

"You hesitate, Marguerite."

"I—in the kindness and affection of Mr. Mortimer," she added; but with an effort. "In the home that he has given me—in striving to make him happy in his old age. Tell me that you think it right to do as I have said—that we will agree to forget the past?"

"Agree not to speak of it rather! it can never be forgotten. The one bright spot out of my whole existence—those few short months when, however guiltily, I loved—was near you; no, Marguerite! it is impossible for me to say, 'I can forget it.' If any recollection

of that time makes it bitter for you to see me now, I will never intrude upon you again—leave England, even, if you wish it. If you say that I may still approach you, but never allude to the past, I will obey you faithfully —to the letter. But I will not deceive you —I can forget nothing. My love for you was the only true one of my life, I have sullied it by no other since—it will go with me to my grave. Hopeless now, as when I first loved you, it is dearer to me than every prospect of ambition or personal advancement;—dearer than anything the world can offer. During long years of absence it has only smouldered, never been extinguished; and last night, at the first sight of your face, the first sound of your voice, arose as strong—yes, stronger! then on that day when I strained you to my heart and thanked God that I might die with you. Tell me to leave you, Marguerite—tell me that as a married woman there is wrong in your being with me again; but do not ask me to forget the past, or to feign an indifference that I can never feel!"

She looked up in his face; her heart thrilled at his words, (cold and dull when written, but

oh, how eloquent spoken by Earnscliffe!) and, wrong or right, let those judge who have been likewise tempted—Marguerite could not bid him see her no more. What weight had thoughts of duty or prudence as she listened? The five lethargic years she had passed without Philip were gone; and they were again together as in the earliest, fondest days of their love. She fancied the beatings of the waves came in through the open windows—that Manon's well-known voice was speaking in the garden beneath—her father smiling at her from his old place by the fire!

"Philip, I can never ask you to leave me again—never believe that there is wrong in seeing you."

"Oh, Marguerite! you do not know the happiness those words hold out to me. After the loneliness of years, to be once more near you—occasionally to be allowed to visit you, hear your voice, gaze silently upon your face, will be delight I can scarcely realize—an oasis such as I never hoped to find! But you look flushed and tired, my—Mrs. Mortimer, I mean. Tell me that you are not wearied with my long visit?"

"How could I be wearied with you? I am flushed—but not with fatigue. Are you really going so soon?" as Earnscliffe rose with signs of departure. "You have not looked at the books yet, or at my drawings—I have learnt to draw since I saw you last—or at a portrait of my mother that I wished you to see. Do stay a little while longer!"

And Earnscliffe stayed until the golden sunset flooded the room, and the timepiece struck seven, and the hour of his dinner-party in town was over. And all this time every word of Marguerite's, every gesture, every wave of her dress, as she flitted lightly before him with her books and drawings, was recalling his old passion, and making his pulse once more tremble like a boy's! He—who yesterday declared he had outlived love! And poor Marguerite! safe as she believed them both, after their candid avowal and her own resolutions, looked up with her frank, confiding gaze, and spoke unreservedly as ever, and once, even, touched his hand with her old familiar gesture, and believed that it was all friendship. . . . . .

When Earnscliffe was about fifty yards beyond the lodge-gates on his way to town, he

met an old-fashioned carriage, with fat, sleek horses, and servants, and a red-faced, portly-looking man, whose countenanance was the reverse of pleasant—(Mortimer's temper had not recovered the loss of his thousand-pounds bill, and his indignation against Shadbrook Brothers)—inside.

"Marguerite's husband!" thought Philip, instinctively, and, reining in his horse, he turned to see if the carriage entered the gates—"Marguerite's husband!" he repeated, as it did so—"And I am to be her friend! Why does fate throw me across her path, poor child! unless—unless ——?"

But whatever was that rising thought, for this time, at least, he checked it—and rode quickly on to town through the deepening twilight.

CHAPTER XIV.

"How pale you look, Marguerite! and so dreadfully nervous! You scarcely hear a word I am saying; all your gaieties are not improving your beauty!"

It was Miss Georgy who spoke. After remaining for some months indignant with Marguerite, she at last bethought herself that she was gaining nothing by the coolness; and that—although Mrs. Mortimer could not, or would not, introduce her to her great friends—Mrs. Mortimer's own parties, and an occasional place in her opera-box, were infinitely better than nothing.

So (about a month later than Philip's first visit to Wimbledon), Miss Georgy came down

unexpectedly one fine day, to see 'dear Marguerite;'—prepared, as she said, to forgive and forget everything, and have a long friendly morning together.

The standing commencement of these 'mornings' of female affection being for one friend to say something mortifying to the other, Miss De Burgh had opened proceedings by commenting very plainly upon her young relative's ill-looks. But Marguerite, fitful in spirits, after the now daily excitement of meeting Philip, and weary from the effects of a feverish sleepless night, cared nothing for any comments on her beauty.

"I must be pale, I know," was her reply, "for I feel far from well, and so weary,"—leaning her head down on the silken pillows of the sofa—"I believe I go out too much."

"Ah, yes!" returned Georgy, with one or two nods; "but I always foresaw it all, as you know. I am not surprised." Then, when Marguerite made no attempt to elicit further explanation, she added, "I always told you what it would be, if you and Earnscliffe ever met again."

"Georgy"—her pale cheeks colouring up

in a second—"I don't understand you—I ——"

"My dear Marguerite! the time is past for any excessive innocence now. After one flirtation with your cousin"—(Georgy's eyes glistened spitefully; she had once entertained hopes of St. Leon for herself)—"although it appears he was not too *épris* to return to France the moment there was a chance of his own advancement—and now with all London talking of you and Earnscliffe, extreme simplicity is almost out of character."

"All London talking of me! Georgy, you must jest."

"Not in the least, dear; although I am not one of your *crême de la crême*, I know quite people enough to be *au fait* of all fashionable scandal; and I will tell you, as a friend, that I hear your name a great deal oftener than is creditable for a married woman, especially when in connection with a man of the notoriety of Earnscliffe."

"What can they say of me? Who can be sufficiently interested to mark my actions?"

"About that I do not know; what they say, however, is very soon told; that you are

carrying on a most desperate flirtation! However, it does not signify much, as long as your husband hears nothing of it," she added, with a laugh. "You are quite right to amuse yourself."

'As long as your husband hears nothing.' The careless words awakened a vague chill of terror in Marguerite's heart. Could the world be really speaking evil of her? Could there be a chance of Mortimer's hearing it? She felt that any anger her own explanation might have awakened, would be nothing compared to *that.*

Georgy read her face directly; and, for reasons of her own, repented she had said so much. She did not wish Marguerite and her husband to have scenes and explanations, or leave London just then.

"Oh, I was only half in earnest!" she cried, quickly; "but you take everything so extremely *au serieux.* English people always invent scandal about each other, you know; it's one of our national peculiarities. Abroad, no one dares pry into the darkness of their neighbours' affairs; they have so much to do thinking of their own. But Mr. Mortimer is

not likely to hear the *on dits* of your world. He never goes out with you, does he?"

"Never!" returned Marguerite—sadly. I go out entirely alone."

"Well—it is trying for you; but then, from the way you used to talk, we all thought you were quite removed from the temptation of ordinary mortals! 'Gaities had no charm for you!' 'You liked to look old, for Mortimer's sake,' and so on. I always knew though, that it could not last. Are you going to Mrs. Lorrimer's fête, by-the-bye?"

"I have an invitation, of course; but I have thought nothing about it. No, I don't believe I shall go. I dislike those long daylight entertainments—especially now that I am not well."

"But you can go late," said Georgy. "There is to be a ball, *al fresco*, and the grounds illuminated, and I know not what besides. I hear it will be a most brilliant affair, and the weather is now perfection for such a fête."

"I wish you could go in my place, Georgy—I am sure you would enjoy it."

"Dear Marguerite! how kind of you—

but that is impossible, you know; one person cannot accept the invitation of another. If you were going, it would be different.

"Oh! if I were going, I could take you easily. I know Mrs. Lorrimer so well, that I should not scruple to bring you with me."

"Ah! dear Marguerite, do go—for my sake," pleaded Georgy, in her softest manner. "I have had such a dull season, and mamma is getting more selfish, and cares less for anything but homœopathy, and her own fancied complaints, every day. Do take me!"

Marguerite would infinitely have preferred remaining away; it was not the kind of thing she cared for at any time, and she shrank now from the thought of a great daylight crowd, where she would meet every acquaintance she had in the world—but Georgy looked so eager, she did not like to refuse, especially, after the cold feeling that had lately existed between them.

"Well! as you like," she answered. "What day is it for? I have forgotten all about it. You will find the card somewhere among that heap of invitations on the table."

"I know the day—dear—I have heard all

about it from a friend of mine who is going, and whom I particularly wish to meet. June the first—that will be next Friday—in three days. Marguerite, how goodnatured of you to take me! What must I wear?" Georgy's manner was so childlike, it was difficult to believe that she was ten years older than her intended chaperone.

"Wear—Oh, Georgy! I have so many dresses that I have never worn. I wish you would take one of them. It would be really a kindness; for this will probably be my last gaiety this season, and by next year they will be old-fashioned. Eulalie could make any alteration you liked."

Miss De Burgh was not too proud to accept the offer, and accompanied her to her dressing-room; where, after a long inspection of numbers of costly toilettes, she chose the most expensive she could see—and Marguerite's last bonnet from Paris; with the small additions of French gloves and sleeves.

"Are you quite sure you can spare them?" said Georgy, after Mademoiselle Eulalie had carefully packed up her spoil.

"Oh, yes! Indeed I care nothing for gay

dresses, myself. It is Mr. Mortimer who insists upon my having all these rich things."

"And yet, with all your extravagances, you seem to have plenty left for charity. I see your name at the head of every list and subscription."

"Yes! out of our superfluity. We feel nothing that we give. I have never spoken to a poor person since I married."

"Of course not! In your position, and living in London, or near it, you can't do those things as though you were a curate's wife, on a hundred a year, in the country."

"So Mr. Mortimer says; and of course he is right—"

"Talking of country curates, Marguerite.' interrupted Georgy, "Do you remember your admirer—Mr. Ignatius Shirley?"

"Who said I was an Anglican? Yes. I remember him, I did not like him."

"Will you believe that, after all his professions, and shaving his hair close to his head, and intoning the service, and saying (when mamma demanded an explanation of his attentions to me) that the Catholic priesthood should not marry, he has gone completely round.

His new rector was Low Church, and very rich, with one daughter; and the mean little wretch became Broad Church in a week, then as Low as possible, in the hopes of getting her. However, I am happy to say, the girl married someone else; and Shirley has just been well pulled up by his new bishop—who is an Anglican again—for saying in one of his sermons that 'baptism was a pleasing form.'"

"And what have become of your own opinions, Georgy? You went even further than Mr. Shirley, I remember."

"I am developing," said Miss De Burgh, solemnly—"developing ——"

"Into what?" asked Marguerite, to whom the phrase was new.

"Is it possible that you are ignorant of the beautiful theory of developement? Oh, Marguerite! my future life will show it you."

"And who is your preceptor in this new—system?" Marguerite inquired, aware that without a priest no faith would do for Georgy.

"My present counsellor is the comte De Montravers—a man to whom England will one day owe her regeneration. We shall meet him, I trust, on Friday."

"I am surprised that those to whom such serious questions are all-important, can care for the frivolities of society!" Marguerite remarked.

"Yes!" returned Georgy, with a pitying shake of the head, "that is how the world speaks, knowing nothing of the beautiful elasticity which is our chiefest characteristic. We go into society for society's sake—not our own."

Marguerite wondered, as this was the case, that Georgy should care for Brussels lace and Paris bonnets; but concluded it was part of the elasticity she spoke of.

"But I never dance now," said Miss De Burgh. "What I can, without singularity, renounce of these follies I do." Georgy had arrived at that delicate time of a young lady's life when partners become scarce, and *will* devote themselves to young creatures of sixteen, which, perhaps, explained the secret of her giving up dancing. "Is that your lunch bell, Marguerite? I must make an early dinner with you. To-day is a festival, and I attend complins."

They went down to the dining-room; and, from Miss De Burgh's vigorous onslaught

upon chicken-pie and jelly, Marguerite concluded that fasting was an exercise, to the practice of which she had not yet 'developed.'

"What time shall you call for me?" she inquired, when her little meal was finished. "Let us go late; the effect is much better on entering fresh, and when other people are beginning to be tired and hot."

"Certainly late—we shall have fewer hours of it at least—five, do you think?"

"Oh! at the latest, Marguerite; remember it is an *al fresco* affair, and the dancing will commence early."

"But, as we neither of us care for it? However, name the hour you like. I am not going for my own pleasure."

"Well, suppose you say that you leave your house at four, by the time you have picked me up, and we drive to Richmond, it will be late enough in all conscience. Good bye!"

"But you do not walk, surely?"

"No. I came—mamma is so mean—I was obliged to come—in the omnibus."

"Then wait at least till I order the carriage round for you, I am going to ride on horseback this afternoon."

"Oh, you dear kind creature!"

And after more kisses, and much amiability, Georgy took her leave, to be in time for complins; but not forgetting to have Marguerite's presents carefully stowed away in the carriage.

CHAPTER XV.

MARGUERITE said rightly that Earnscliffe had much to make life desirable in his genius and ambition. He had returned no longer a dreaming boy, with morbid feelings towards one class because they had slighted him, towards another because they had misappreciated his books. He thought much less of himself altogether than in his early youth. Great and settled principles had dawned upon him in this interval; and, as at thirty every man must strengthen in his onward or retrogade path, the turning point had arrived from whence Philip's was to be recognized as one of the leading intellects of the day.

The downfall of a ministry—only held

together because any change at that crisis was dangerous—was imminent; and under a new administration Earnscliffe's intention was to enter parliament, and take an active part in the social reform of which he was now a deliberate supporter; and he watched all public affairs with the anxious scrutiny of one who, ere long, hoped to be a zealous worker in the somewhat rusty machine of English government.

Meantime he went as much as ever into society; and soon had an only too-engrossing object there—an object before which for the time, even his own political advancement was secondary. In three weeks from the day of their first meeting, Philip knew that he loved Marguerite with a passion compared to which even his former love for her seemed tame and poor! He strove with it—he felt that it was madness—putting aside any higher consideration of religion—that, even if Marguerite were to become his, the misery of both would be sealed; yet he could not resist temptation by leaving London, or seeing her no more.

She was not a woman to inspire half-attach-

ments. St. Leon had loved her with a passion deeper than he himself believed his nature capable of; no wonder Earnscliffe, with his warm enthusiastic temperament, loved her beyond the bounds of prudence or of reason. He had not learnt in his youth that where reason stops, paralyzed and forceless, a higher principle can conquer; and that only religion—warm heart-felt religion, can combat the frailty of our erring nature, and still the wild dictates of earthly desire. He had to learn it by a bitterer lesson than any which his life had yet taught him!

And Marguerite? did no warning voice tell her that there was danger in all these meetings with the man she had so loved? that when her heart fluttered, her pulse leapt at his voice—it was a sin? that the very fact of her silence with her husband was evidence of her heart's knowledge of its own guilt? Did she so easily succumb to the influence of passion? Reader, judge her lightly! In this great world—where hypocrisy reigns triumphant, and feigned religion folds her hands and thanks God she is 'not as other men'—where many a fair young countess rolls along in her carriage,

more guilty in the eyes of heaven than the poor wretches who look after her from the pavement—in this great world, there are few women like Marguerite. Distrustful of herself, perfect in her confidence of those she loved, reliant as a child—her blindness regarding her real position with Earnscliffe must be viewed more as weakness of nature than of principle. Deeply loving in disposition, ever anxious to look up to a character greater and nobler than her own, caring in reality nothing for the great world into which accident had thrown her, or the wealth with which she was surrounded—what wonder that in a few short weeks to be again with a man like Philip, to listen to his high thoughts, his vivid fancy, the charm with which his genius invested all he said—became the only and exquisite happiness of her life—while she remained utterly unconscious that in such happiness there could be wrong. She had felt certainly a vague depression of spirits after being with Earnscliffe; less interest than ever in her usual life; slight impatience at Mortimer's prosy stories—a keener sense perhaps of his vulgarity and absence of refinement. But she

was too ill-versed in human nature to give heed to these signs of her own heart; and had never suspected, even, that their intimacy was commented on by others, until Georgy's words aroused her with the startled conviction that already she had gone too far!

Earnscliffe went rarely to Wimbledon, and when he did so his visits were short. Unlike St. Leon, he shrank from receiving the hearty grasp of Mortimer's hand; his ever ready hospitality; his cordial and frequent invitations. The absence of all distrust or suspicion in the old man, his utter confidence in Marguerite, were irresistible appeals to one of Philip's generous nature. Although he had not the courage to withdraw from the wrong itself, he shunned communion with the man whom his own conscience told him he was injuring, and at last only met Marguerite in the parks, or at parties and the opera. But, then, these meetings ocurred at the least, every five days out of the seven!

"I hear grave things of you," said his old friend Neville, one morning when Philip was alone with him in his studio. Neville

lived in a good house now; and was, according to his own ideas, a very rich man. "Everyone is coupling your name with that of Mrs. Mortimer. Surely you will not let the fair fame of the woman you were once ready to die for, be sacrificed to gratify your vanity? Whatever are your faults, Phil., *that* is unlike you!"

"Who mentioned my name with hers?" exclaimed Philip, angrily. "Who dared to breathe one word in detraction of Mrs. Mortimer? Neville, you are bound to tell me."

"My good friend be cool! If I were to tell you the names of half the men in London you could not challenge them all—supposing that duelling were still in fashion. When you are devoted to Mrs. Mortimer at every party where you meet her, are always seen in her box at the opera, or riding beside her in the Park; I suppose—ignorant as I am of such things—that it is just to call you—her very warm admirer, and not unmerited to speak lightly of herself. Married Englishwomen don't encourage these innocent friendships you know—'sans peur et sans reproche'—as they do in France or Italy!"

Philip made no reply. Something in Neville's plain way of speaking brought the real truth before him; and he shuddered to think that Marguerite's name was being sullied by all the idle men, and loungers in clubs, to whom the death of any woman's fair fame is a welcome jest, and that he should be the cause.

"These kind of things are so incomprehensible to me," pursued Neville, throwing himself back in the chair, and sending forth a perfect volcano of smoke from his short meerchaum. "Boys love, as I told you I once did, and make a horrible mess of it in general—I can understand that. Men love, in after life, and if the object is some young girl, and they marry her, I can understand that, and pity them for their folly. Men of all ages dignify by the name of love what they feel a dozen times for the painted 'Cynthia of the minute,'—I can understand that, though I loathe these miserable wretches myself. But the kind of entanglement into which you are now entering, is a madness I can neither understand nor pity. *Yours*, mind—I pity her, by Jove! The world is wide, there are hundreds

of women of all ages and conditions whom you might easily win, yet you still pursue and hunt down this poor little creature, who very nearly lost herself for you before, when she was a child. I see no glory in it at all! They tell me that hitherto, although she is married to some old man who never leaves home, no breath has ever been raised against her conduct;—at least, then, her nature is a good one. She is neither vain, nor led away by all the adulation she receives. If she falls, it will be from love. Leave her, Phil!—such a fall is a terrible one, and would seal the misery of you both. How is it all to end? that is what I ask. No two human beings in the world ever went on in this sort of way for ever—how is it to end? By her deserting her home and husband for you? Oh—you turn away! but such is the conclusion of this kind of attachment. Then—what is the result? At thirty—just when your life is really beginning—you are saddled with a woman for ever whom it would be infamy to desert, yet whose presence after six months will be a literal burden to you. A woman, uncorrupt in heart, yet classed by the world with the vilest

of her sex—debarred for ever from all society but yours—always in tears, always devoured by self-reproach that she would vainly seek to hide—such would be your household companion! Suppose a step further—there is a divorce, or the husband dies, and you marry her—as a man of honour you must do so—worse and worse still! You are now married to a woman society will never receive; you can never forget what she was (what you made her—mind!) before she was your wife; you can never feel respect for her, or she for you. If she is still young and beautiful, you will be jealous of your own most intimate friend; remember the fair face with which she deceived her first husband, when she was encouraging you; and never be alone with her writing-desk without the secret wish to break it open, and discover if the same sort of notes are lying there, which you remember to have existed in the time of Mr. Mortimer, defunct."

"Good heavens, Neville!—have you done?" interrupted Philip, impatiently. "I never heard any human being talk so fast os incessantly, as yourself. You go on with your

imaginings, until you make me out a thorough villain, betrayer, seducer—almost murderer. I wish you would reflect upon what you are saying."

"It would be well for you to do so, my friend!" replied Neville, re-lighting his meerschaum, which had gone out during his harangue. "However, some day you will remember my counsels, and wish you had attended to them."

"Neville!" exclaimed Philip, springing up, and speaking very earnestly, "you misunderstand me altogether. I would give my right hand sooner than Marguerite should be ill thought of. But you know not all the history of her past life and mine; the difficulties there are in the way of acting rightly. You can, however, guess my feelings, for you have seen her;—tell me with your cooler judgment, what I ought to do—how act, as a man of honour?"

"How act with honour, Earnscliffe?—ye gods! how obtuse we are to plain truths when our passions blind us! Leave her at once—how can there be a question? Break it off directly."

"And her feelings?"

"Oh! her feelings *are* already engaged then too? It is even worse than I thought. I will tell you what, Phil, no half-measure will avail now. Leave town immediately—go abroad again—to Scotland—anywhere you will, and stay there till the whole affair is past. When you return, it will be comparatively easy to avoid the snare once escaped—feign another love for example. Are you listening to a single word I am saying, mon cher, or only meditating, after the common manner of human nature, how you will not act upon the advice you asked for?"

"I have heard you," replied Philip, slowly, "and know that you are thus far right. It must be broken off at once, or never."

"And between those two you hesitate? Between common sense and common honour, and eternal—"

"Neville!" he interrupted abruptly, "there are some points upon which no third person can give an opinion. Thank you for your good intentions, and—good morning;" and before his friend could speak again he had quitted the room.

"And I have lost half my morning," soliloquised the artist when he was gone. "Oh! the folly of arguing with a man in love."

That evening Marguerite was at the opera, more fresh and youthful-looking than ever, in a white dress and natural flowers (Earnscliffe had said how much he preferred seeing her without her rubies and diamonds, which her bright young face so little needed, and of late she had never worn them when Mortimer would allow her to appear in public, dressed according to her own simple taste). During the second act, she saw Philip enter a box on the other side of the house, and seat himself beside one of the youngest beauties of the season, to whom he began paying—or appearing to pay—the most marked attention. Perhaps he was already trying to follow Neville's advice—perhaps he wished to test how Marguerite would brook divided homage. She was, however, devoid of all small jealousy; and thinking it quite natural Philip should sometimes like to talk to others beside herself, she smiled and chatted with just her usual manner to the bevy of box-loungers, who approached her between the acts.

"That eastern man," lisped Mr. Grottiesley, or 'little Grot,' as his friends called him—a young guardsman, with straw-coloured moustache and moonlike face, who had long wished to be one of Marguerite's admirers. "What is his name? Earnton, Earnley—you know who I mean?"

"Mr. Earnscliffe, perhaps."

"Oh!—ah!—he really has something to say, I suppose; Miss Carlton Vere appears actually listening as he talks to her?"

"Yes," replied Marguerite, smiling, "one always remembers, at least, what Mr. Earnscliffe is talking about, which is not the case with every one, I must confess."

"Oh!—ah!—yes!—tombs I suppose, and all that—ah!—dreadful bore, men who have been to Thebes and Petra, and places, and talk about what they have seen. Now *I* have been all over the world—Egypt—Jerusalem—Crimea—St. Petersburg—but you would not guess it, would you?"

"Oh, no!" Marguerite answered, in her most simple manner. "I should have thought you had only just left school. Is it possible that you have really travelled?"

"Miss Carlton Vere is not half as pretty as she is usually called," remarked a friend, who was listening with pleasure to little Grot's failure. "Do you think anything of her, Mrs. Mortimer?"

"Indeed I do!" replied Marguerite; "hers is just the style I admire—such finely chiselled features, and that pale, alabaster complexion."

"A poet's beauty, in short. Earnscliffe seems to consider it so."

But Marguerite's calm expression did not vary for a second; and the young guardsman, who disliked tombs, remarked to his friend, when they had left her box—

"That woman is the deepest hand I ever knew; she never even changed colour at my sarcasms about that puppy, Earnscliffe."

Philip, meantime, was absent and *distrait;* replied to his companion's lively sallies in the wrong place, and looked grave where he should have laughed. He was intently watching Marguerite all the time, and wondering how she could be so happy and smiling without him—nay, more, while he was apparently devoted to a fresh object. Had he, after all, given her credit for deeper feeling than she possessed?—

would the idea of parting from him again affect her as deeply as he had told Neville? His impatience soon overcame all previous resolution; and, feigning some excuse, he actually started up in the midst of one of Miss Carlton Vere's prettiest young-lady remarks, and came quickly round to Marguerite's box.

She heard the door softly open, and knew, without turning round, that it was Earnscliffe (at all times she could feel his presence without seeing him). They had met already that afternoon in the park, and Philip seated himself, without any salutation, in the farthest corner of the box, where the deep shadow screened him from observation, while Marguerite still kept her eyes upon the stage. Without exactly knowing why, she felt embarrassed, and waited for him to speak first.

"Is it possible!" he thought, as he scanned her features, "that she is only trifling with me?—coquetting, like any other woman, and as—for ought I know to the contrary—she may actually have done with that French cousin already?" (From the beginning of time, whoever has loved has been unjust, at the slightest breath of jealousy). "She did not look—

when talking to that young fool just now—as though it would break her heart to part with me. However, it shall be put to the test."

After a few minutes' silence, Philip said, shortly, and with no preparation—"Mrs. Mortimer, if your attention is not too much engrossed with the music, I have come to wish you good-bye!"

She started round and faltered—"Good-bye—Oh, Mr. Earnscliffe! only for a short—"

"For months—a year, perhaps—my absence will be quite indefinite."

She looked at him in utter astonishment as he spoke in this cold, strange tone—looked at him with compressed lips, tearful, dilated eyes, as no coquette in this world ever looked.

"Another parting," she murmured, very low—"Oh! how shall I bear it?"

Then she turned away, and Philip saw her hand clasp tightly over her side, with the old gesture that any sudden pain called forth; and, at once, he was re-assured of poor Marguerite's sincerity. 'Could he leave her after this?—was he justified in breaking off their friendship, now that he was certain of having awakened all the long-buried love of that gentle nature?'

"Marguerite, can my actions indeed affect you so much? Will *you* bid me remain?"

She looked round, very slowly this time, and, without saying a word, held out her hand to him. Earnscliffe took it; its pressure thrilled to his very heart; and, from that moment, all further irresolution on his part was over—all fainter warnings of his better nature unheeded—he felt that Marguerite must be his.

"How could you so trifle with me?" she asked, after a time; "you could not indeed mean to leave again, when you have only just returned to England, and are so occupied with your political prospects? How foolish I was to believe you! But these are cruel jests! I have too few real friends to bear the thought of losing one of them."

"You could really feel pain at parting with me?"

"Really? Oh! Mr. Earnscliffe, I know how badly I dissemble—you must have read it on my face?"

"I am afraid to read your face now—afraid lest my own wishes should read differently to the truth—afraid even to read the truth."

"You speak strangely to-night; I scarcely understand you."

"Shall I be plainer, Marguerite?"

"Oh, hush! we are not listening to the sweetest notes of the Piccolomini,"—and she turned from him, blushing.

"I only hear one voice!" replied Earnscliffe; and during the remainder of the opera neither spoke again. But for them, silence was now only too eloquent.

When the last act was over, Marguerite rose to leave (she never stayed for the ballet), and Philip, as usual, escorted her to her carriage. They had to wait some time before it came up, and both seemed constrained and disinclined to speak. Earnscliffe dared not trust himself to do so; and Marguerite, without knowing why, felt herself trembling nervously as she held his arm. She tried a dozen times to make some common-place remark to break the silence, but each time the words died on her lips, and at length with an effort she exclaimed suddenly, just what she least intended to say.

"I wonder what makes us both so dull to-night?" with a forced laugh.

Earnscliffe bent down and whispered—something that made his companion shrink and turn cold.

"No, no—it is impossible. I cannot listen to such words, even from you."

"Then why ask me not to leave you? We can continue no longer as we are now, either our intimacy must cease at once, or——" his voice faltered, and became so low that only Marguerite's ear could catch its sound.

They were standing apart from the crowd, and where a deep shadow fell across them both; but Earnscliffe could see the whiteness of her face as she looked up to his, and how her lips quivered.

"Never!" she replied, slowly, and as though each word was wrung from her with pain. "I will never leave him—nor forget all that I owe to him. No, not for your sake!"

"Then I have been mistaken!" said Philip "I believed that you loved me—that, loving me, you would make any sacrifice, even that of name or position, for me. I believed you incapable of trifling with me—as you had already done with your cousin Gaston," he added, sarcastically. He had not anticipated

so instant a rejection, and his pride was wounded by her tone.

"Gaston!" echoed Marguerite. "*You* accuse me of trifling with him, and compare my feelings towards you with what I bore him! Then you shall hear me—I will tell you the exact truth, Mr. Earnscliffe. I never cared for Gaston more than as a cousin. I misled him unintentionally—and—I *have* loved you—loved you as a child, when I was ignorant of my sin in doing so—shall never cease to love you, now even that I know my guilt. But," she went on passionately, "I will not bring dishonour on my husband—I will never leave him—never cause one moment's sorrow to the only being on earth who has been my friend. And though my heart may break in the effort, I—I will part from you—Philip."

She took her hand from his arm, and strove to move away; but Earnscliffe could see that she trembled too violently to be able to walk, and fearing observation from the crowds of people who were near, he whispered hurriedly, "Mrs. Mortimer, I entreat of you to take my arm. I have been most wrong to speak to you thus, and at such a time—pardon me. I will offend no more."

She accepted his arm, for she felt that her limbs were powerless to support her; and neither uttered a word, until Marguerite had entered the carriage. Then she bent forward, unable to part with him in anger—and already reproaching herself for the pain she had caused him.

"Philip! if I spoke harshly, forgive me. It is better that you should leave, that we should not meet again; but—forget this evening—think of me with kindness, for I shall be very miserable."

The carriage drove away, and Philip stood gazing after it through the dim light, his arms folded, his lips compressed. "She is mine," he thought, "mine already! Her last frail defence is pity for the old man. An hour—a moment will overthrow it. The desire of my whole life is attained; the only woman I have really loved—won." And he turned and walked slowly homewards, yet with no feeling of elation at his heart.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER a few hours of feverish, troubled sleep, Marguerite awoke to the misery of another day;—that cold consciousness of what has occurred, which is worse to bear than the actual passionate sorrow of the previous evening. She had to listen to Mortimer's usual stories and extracts from the newspaper at breakfast, and strive to make replies; parry his questions about her pale face, and odd confused manner, tell him what she had done, whom she had seen the night before.

'Mr. Earnscliffe—ah! he liked Earnscliffe. Why did he not come oftener to see them? why would he not accept their invitations to dinner now? it was very strange, as he was an old friend of her father's.' And so on, while

Marguerite's hands grew colder and colder, and her breath came so thick and hurried, she could scarcely articulate anything in reply.

She felt intensely relieved when Mortimer departed, with the announcement that he should not return till dinner-time, and she had at least the solace of being alone and unquestioned. During all the forenoon she remained in her own dressing-room, unoccupied and tearless; but with somewhat the same dull, leaden sense of oppression upon her that she had experienced before leaving Kersaint. After luncheon she shut herself in the library, with orders that no visitors should be admitted, and then strove to exert herself to read. But though the words floated before her eyes, her mind did not receive their meaning; and would recur to the all-engrossing object of her previous thoughts. So, after mechanically turning over the pages for an hour or two, she laid the book aside, and then opening a private drawer in one of the cases, took out a manuscript book of her own writing, and seating herself by the table made a short entry on its last leaf.

This book had been given her by her father,

on her twelfth birthday; when he had told her that she should try and note down in it the progress of her own mind and feelings from that day onward, until she was a woman. And, faithful to every wish of his, Marguerite had continued to do so even to the present time; so that it formed a complete history of her whole inner life from her childhood till now.

The story of her love for Earnscliffe was written with the most entire truthfulness; her confession of it to him on the day of the storm —her anguish at parting with him—all was there without a gloss of concealment. Then came her dreary life with the Danbys—then her marriage. After this, there were for two or three years few entries; occasionally, a subdued expression, not of complaint, but of her want of interest in existence—a fear, that, for Mortimer's happiness, she had committed an error in marrying him. Later on came the description of her entrance into the world, and of all the admiration she received there; but still with allusions to the one great object that her life lacked, and whose place no triumphs of her beauty and talents could supply.

At last came her meeting with Earnscliffe, and Marguerite trembled as she read over all that she had written since then, and compared it with the early description of her love for him at Kersaint. There was so slight a difference; only the childish simplicity of style was altered; the feeling was the same—or deeper!

"It would be better destroyed," she thought. "This journal records no very happy life; and if I were to die suddenly—not an unlikely event, I know—it would fall into Mr. Mortimer's keeping, and render him miserable in the thought that I was less contented than he believed me. I had better destroy it. It is strange that my entry of to-day should fill the last leaf!—is it that after this my real history will be over—my life have nothing more to record? or—" And a vague, but solemn presentiment whispered, that perhaps her life, *indeed*, was almost past.

"I had better destroy it at once," she repeated, slowly, and approaching towards the fire.

But those pages recalled so much; the early entries before she had ever known Earnscliffe, so brought back her childhood, and Kersaint,

that after hesitating for some time, Marguerite decided she would not burn it yet. 'And besides, it was her father's gift.' And so the book was again laid in its former place, and then, falteringly, she drew forth some notes and papers that were always kept in the same drawer with her journal.

On some of them the ink was faded now—the paper discoloured. These were scraps of poetry, half playful, half serious, that Philip used to write at Kersaint; all carefully treasured, even then, and with them was the long letter which he had written to her from the Tyrol. But Marguerite knew all these by heart; and, after holding them in her hand for a few seconds, she replaced them; and then, but very hesitatingly, and as though other eyes than her own were in the silent room, took out another packet of letters. These were, however, freshly written, and still in Philip's hand.

As Marguerite read and re-read some of the ambiguously-worded notes he had lately written her—but to every syllable of which her heart could now attach a different meaning to what it had done when she first read them—a knock came at the door of the

library. It was only her own maid, but Marguerite's heart fluttered, and her cheeks glowed with all the confusion of guilt as she entered.

"Un billet pour madame," presenting on a salver, one of those notes which Marguerite knew was from Philip, at a glance.

"I see: there is no answer," she said, with forced calmness. And Mademoiselle Eulalie withdrew, not in the least deceived; for, though all the world may be blinded in such matters, a French lady's maid never can; and the first downward step in a woman's career is when her own servants suspect her.

When she was alone, Marguerite tore open the letter hastily, and with a strange mixture of feelings—half hoping that he had indeed carried out his promise and was gone—half dreading lest he should have really left without once more seeing her. There were only these words:

"Marguerite,—The time has now come for you to decide. If I see you at Mrs. Lorrimer's on Friday, I shall consider your sentence of last night is recalled. If you are not there, I leave England *alone* the following day."

The paper fell from her hand, and a sharp pain struck at Marguerite's heart. "Cruel!" she murmured faintly, "Cruel, to make me decide upon our separation, and force it upon me so soon. Yet it must be so—sooner or later, I might have known it could only end thus—it is better finished at once." Then she laid her head upon the table and wept with one of the wild paroxysms of her childhood, as she had not wept for years, and thus a full hour passed away. She was careless if the servants entered, and saw her so—careless even of Mortimer's return—only the one consciousness of losing Philip was present to her, and she would scarcely have heeded if the whole world had been present to witness her desolation.

At last, slowly, she raised her pale face, and again read the note through, but with eyes so hot and painful she could scarcely trace even Earnscliffe's bold, clear writing. "If I am not at Mrs. Lorrimer's, he will leave England. If I go—but—no—no," she cried vehemently, as a wild thought of happiness would cross her brain, "I must not meet Philip again; if I am even there, he will consider my sentence

recalled. I shall see him no more then—he will leave me for ever, and my whole life is bound up in his. Oh, my God! pity me, and guide me in my weakness and my anguish!"

She rose and placed Philip's last note with all the others, as though she would resist temptation by not looking even at what was his again; locked the drawers and went into her own room, where she bathed her face and strove to become more composed before her husband saw her, for it was already nearly the time for his return.

As it happened, he came home rather earlier than usual, and very hungry; and for almost the first time since her marriage, Marguerite was late for dinner. Punctual himself to a fault, nothing disturbed Mortimer's temper more than the want of punctuality in others. He actually spoke harshly to her when Marguerite appeared, at five minutes past seven, and faltered some gentle excuses for keeping dinner waiting.

"Yes, ma'am, when I, with all my business, can always be in time for everything, I do think that you, with nothing but your own pleasures to think of, may manage to remem-

ber my hours. What kept you out so late to-day, pray?"

"I have not been out at all, sir. I felt very unwell, and have been by myself ever since you left."

"Of course there is some reason always! What made the carriage late then in calling for me yesterday in the city? You were so hurried going off to the opera last night, that I was not able to ask you, but I *will* have more order in my house."

"I am very sorry you were kept waiting, Mr. Mortimer; but Georgy came to see me in the morning, and I sent her home in the carriage, which I suppose caused the delay."

"Of course, if one of those women could get into a private carriage, she would drive all over the town to show off! Your own sense might have told you that. So Georgy has been here again, eh? and you were all affection together, I suppose, after the manner of women's friendships."

"I received her in the spirit with which she came. It is much better there should be no further coldness between us."

"Will you take my arm, Mrs. Mortimer?"

he interrupted, with grim politeness. "My fish is cooling, which is of far more importance to me, you know, than the cooling of young ladies' love." With which sorry attempt at wit, he led Marguerite to the dining-room.

The stately meal passed off in absolute silence. Mortimer was not a man who quickly recovered himself when he was ruffled, and Marguerite was too nervous and weak-spirited to trust herself to speak.

And the butler talked confidentially over their silence afterwards with Mademoiselle Eulalie, and that faithful attendant talked confidentially to the butler about the notes which made her mistress blush and start when she received them, and putting these circumstances together, both decided that something was brewing, and hoped that they would get into the same service if anything turned up, and they had to leave their present one.

When the servants had withdrawn and the wine was on the table, Marguerite began, timidly. "Georgy asked me to take her to Mrs. Lorrimer's fête, yesterday."

"I thought she came to ask for something besides forgiveness!" returned Mortimer. "What did you say?"

"Oh! I said I would—she seemed so earnest about it—I did not like to refuse."

"Well, poor thing!" Mortimer's temper was a little improved after his first glass of port. "I suppose she is making one last desperate effort to be married. She is looking very old and thin; so you don't mind taking her. A good foil, ma'am—eh?"

"Well, the truth is, I wanted to ask you how I must get out of my promise. I told Georgy I would go—and now—and now—"

"You won't take her, I suppose."

"Not exactly that. I have changed my mind, and don't intend to go myself."

"Why?"

"Because—the fact is—I mean I have changed my mind."

"A mighty sensible reason, upon my word! 'I mean—I thought—I have changed my mind.' I never expected fashionable life would make you silly and capricious like other women, Marguerite; but I see it is having the common effect."

"It is not caprice, indeed it is not, I have reasons."

"Let me hear them."

Never did a tone so completely repel confidence; and Marguerite only stammered out something about 'not feeling well.'

"It is not that at all. You change merely because you have promised that wretched young woman to take her among your grand people, and now you think you'll be ashamed of her when she gets there. You will blush next, if I am seen driving about with you!" Mortimer was working himself up with his own words, until he grew fixedly obstinate in determining to oppose Marguerite.

"It looks monstrous unkind of you, ma'am," he pursued, "and I must say is very unlike your former character. Besides, how can you make the excuse to Mrs. Lorrimer of illness, when she sees you riding about every day, perfectly well? Her husband has been a client of mine for twenty years, and I desire you, Marguerite, not to be capricious with her, whatever you are with all your other acquaintance."

"Very well, sir. I was quite wrong; but

it was not caprice, I assure you. I will go," answered Marguerite, her own heart, alas! not combating the point too resolutely.

"And—if this important question of going or not going is settled—I shall have my sleep," said Mortimer, stretching out his large feet, and shutting his eyes. "I am tired, ma'am, and my cold fish has disagreed with me."

And Marguerite stole up in the twilight to the library, and with a tremulous hand wrote,

"I shall be at Mrs. Lorrimer's on Friday; but I recall nothing." Folded, sealed, directed the note to Earnscliffe, and committed it to the velvet paw of Mademoiselle Eulalie.

CHAPTER XVII.

EARNSCLIFFE only saw Marguerite once, from their parting at the door of the opera until the day of Mrs. Lorrimer's fête, and then but for a moment, as he was walking with Neville in Hyde Park. She was on horseback, and bowed to Philip as she passed by; but with a blush and a visible embarrassment most unlike her accustomed calm demeanour.

"By Jove! she is lovely," was Neville's exclamation, "and so young and innocent looking. Spare her, my good fellow, she is too good to fall!"

"Neville—even on the strength of our old friendship—there are some things I will not hear you say. What on earth do you mean

by the expression? How am I to 'spare' Mrs. Mortimer?"

"I am unhappily quick at insight," returned the artist, quietly; "and know as well how things stand between you and her, as you do yourself. Why have you not followed the advice you asked me for, and left town."

"I have acted as I consider right," replied Philip, coldly. "Let us change the subject."

"Oh! as you please. It is of more importance to you than to myself—of more importance to her than to either. Apropos de rien—do you remember, Phil, how we walked together near these 'bowery glades of Kensington,' as somebody calls them, six years ago, and saw Rose Elmslie driving along in Count B——'s pony phaeton, in the afternoon sun? You were indignant with me then about some love-matter, I remember."

"Poor little Rose! what became of her, I wonder?"

"Poor little devil! you should say. After you left England, she went to perdition with a rapidity greater even than what I predicted for her—left Count B——, for some one else, in six weeks, and after that sank lower and

lower—took to drinking, I believe, and was hissed off the stage."

"Is she dead?" asked Philip, quickly. "I never heard all this before."

"You never remembered to ask, probably. She is not dead, my friend—or, I should rather say, was not so last winter. A few months ago, I was returning home quickly in the dusk—after a long walk into the country, to mark the effect of the red sunset over the frozen woods—and, as I was taking a short cut through some of the back streets near the Haymarket, a woman—pale, haggard, desperate—touched me on the sleeve. I turned round, and, pulling my arm from her with a gesture of disgust, told her, in no gentle tone, to leave me. 'I ask you for money,' she said, 'because I am starving. Do you refuse?' As she spoke, I caught sight of her face, and saw that it was—"

"Not—not Rose?"

"Yes, it was Miss Elmslie. I remembered her directly. I scan every face I see too deeply for it to fade from my memory; and hers was not one to forget—even altered and repulsive though it had now become. She had a pecu-

liarly-moulded chin—do you recollect?—small, but firmly cut, and with the slightest dimple in the centre."

"Yes, yes!—go on."

"Well, I knew her by that, in a moment. 'You are Rose Elmslie,' I said—not concealing my horror, as you may suppose. She started aside at the sound of my voice, and tried to push her way through the coarse crowd along the pavement; but I followed, and entreated her to stop—at least, accept such assistance as I could offer. 'Leave me,' she said. 'I shall die soon. I want to see none of you again.' Her voice was weak, but unnaturally low and hollow. 'And you refuse any assistance?' I repeated. 'Yes, from you,' she answered. 'You were one of Earnscliffe's friends, let me pass on!' and again I lost sight of her."

"And made no further endeavours to save her—to force money upon her?"

"Save her? if you had seen her face you would not have spoken of saving her! the greatest mercy was to let her die. Doubtless, she only lived a few weeks longer from that time. Then—a death in the hospital—a pauper funeral would close the scene.

'So let her in calm oblivion lie.'

"As the poet says."

"And you saw her no more?"

"Yes, as I passed the door of a gin-palace, a few minutes later, I caught a glimpse of the same drooping figure, waiting silently by the counter for one of the glasses of 'forgetfulness,' that a smart-looking woman was serving out. Poor wretch!"

Philip felt actually sick. "Great God, what a world is this!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," returned Neville. "It is much as we make it. The world God sends us into is fair in itself; men create sin, and call the world dark. But," he went on, "Rose Emslie was worthless, in heart, the first day you ever saw her—tainted from her childhood; her misery afterwards is the natural conclusion to such a career, and is nothing, even in its blackest horror, compared to the remorse of one who *has* been pure and without reproach. No hell, you know, burns so fiercely as that of the fallen angels!"

"Good morning to you!" said Philip, abruptly. "I see an old friend whom I have

not met for years." And crossing the ring, he left his friend alone.

For a moment Neville watched him. Then, raising his slouched Italian hat upon his forehead, and folding his arms behind him, he marched on; looking as unlike the foppish crowds around him, with his long hair and beard, and strangely cut clothes, as he was unlike them in his high unworldly heart.

Philip's friend was an old club acquaintance whom he had afterwards met abroad, and who had now just returned to England; and, glad to escape from Neville and his own thoughts, Earnscliffe took his arm and they walked townwards together. But again the same subject was, singularly enough, forced upon him.

After some minutes' conversation upon their mutual wanderings since they parted, his friend remarked—

"I have wished to see you for several days; but have been too engaged to find you out, and never could see you at the club. Oh, I forgot! you don't belong to mine now. Nous avons changé, tout celà! and like, everyone's else, your politics are altering."

"Conforming to our present exigencies."

"Oh! that is the term, is it? However, I was going to say, I have often heard of your name and of more than your political prospects. It appears that you are au mieux with this last wonder—la belle Mortimer. Your old luck!"

"You should rather say the old scandal of English clubs," replied Earnscliffe, with assumed indifference. "Mrs. Mortimer's father was a friend of mine, and I am intimate with them."

"*Them!* is the husband ever seen by mortal eyes? I thought the venerable old stock-broker was a kind of myth—only heard of as supplying Madame with diamonds and his name."

"You have been misinformed throughout, then," said Philip, shortly.

"Eh, mon cher! I see the case is serious. When a man denies these things his friends had best be silent. But to turn to another theme—What has become of all our old friends of the coulisses, then? I suppose we may speak of them?"

"I know nothing of them now—I have other interests and other things to think of,"

returned Earnscliffe. Neville's story of Rose was too fresh for him to risk the mention of her name.

"The devil you have! Well, after being abroad so long as I have, one does not know what to speak of on one's return. One man has become a dissenter—another a papist—a third a Gladstonite—and a fourth turns up his eyes when actresses are spoken of, and denies his bonnes fortunes. For heaven's sake, Earnscliffe, come and dine with me and let us talk over old days."

But Philip pleaded an engagement—as glad to escape from this friend as he had been five minutes before from Neville—and, tired of the sunshine and crowds of people, returned to the solitary room at his hotel, and flung himself on his sofa, not to sleep—although he had not slept for two nights—but think. Think—commune with his own heart for the last time before the overwhelming temptation which he knew the morrow—only a few hours more—would bring. From the moment that he received Marguerite's note saying she would once more see him, he knew that she was his (even if any doubt before existed). The contest was

too unequal to last much longer; her exceeding trust in him, her ignorance of her own danger, made the result but too certain. And again, as it had done so often years before, the accusing thought would present itself, "You are betraying God's holiest work, the innocence of a child."

It was no pleasant thought! He rose and paced uneasily about his room, striving—not to combat with the wild dictates of passion; they had remained too long uncontrolled to be under his power now—but to seek out some extenuation with which to satisfy his own conscience. "She was mine, in reality, years ago," he said, half aloud—"Mine, heart and soul, from her childhood. What is any mere conventional tie compared to that? If I left her now, her existence would be one long-continued misery—constantly endeavouring to fulfil her duty as another man's wife — seeking vainly to crush what is part of her very life—her love for me! But, if this remorse Neville speaks of is, indeed, inevitable, will not *that* be a bitterer anguish?—for one so pure to feel that she has become —— pshaw! my devotion will make her forget all that—and every-

thing beside—I wish the dragging hours would wear away!—I shall be calmer when all is decided—Will to-morrow never come?"

He waited impatiently until evening; then, when it was dusk, unable any longer to bear the oppression of solitude and of his own meditations, he ordered his horse and rode down to Wimbledon, where he dismounted at the inn, and walked on towards Mortimer's place, but without entering the gates. He saw nothing of Marguerite, of course: she was alone all the time in the library, writing in her journal —the last entry she ever made there;—but it was enough that he breathed the same air, could catch a glimpse of the walls that enclosed his idol, and he lingered, unnoticed by anyone, until near midnight, and then, under the solemn starlight, rode back to town.

Not quite unnoticed! Mr. Grimes, the butler, had been out on honourable business of his own, and calling on his friend, the innkeeper, heard that Earnscliffe had left his horse there.

"And not come to us!" pondered Grimes. "What's up now?" And that worthy man dodged and peeped, and found Philip, and stole after him, and saw how he looked towards

the house, and paused, and half-spoke, and walked quickly on, only to return and gaze again. And then Grimes returned home, well pleased with what he had seen, and burning to relate it in the servants' hall.

The next morning shone out bright, but not sultry; and by the afternoon it was one of those sweet, still summer days, of which there are about six in the English year—the very weather for an out-of-door fête.

At four o'clock, the Mortimer's carriage called in Tavistock Street, and found Georgy ready-dressed, and in great excitement at the expected dissipation, and the pleasure of breathing the same atmosphere and looking at the same trees and flowers as three or four hundred 'great people,' during a whole long evening.

She returned to Wimbledon for Marguerite, and had to wait for some time in the drawing-room, talking to Mortimer, before she appeared. "Marguerite had had a headache," her husband said, "and had begun to dress late."

"Quite unusual to see you at home, Mr. Mortimer; I thought you were always in the city at this hour."

"I am not very well—I have not felt myself for the last week, and Maggy persuaded me that I ought to stay at home and be quiet. However, I must go to town for an hour or two when you are gone."

"Dear Marguerite has not been looking very well either lately."

"Dear Marguerite has been to too many parties, Miss De Burgh. She is quite well; and will be as blooming as a rose after I take her to the sea."

"Oh! I am delighted to hear that it is nothing but fatigue that made her so pale, but she seemed so very low and nervous."

The door opened, and Marguerite entered, her complexion brighter than usual, and her whole appearance giving the most direct denial to Georgy's kind misgivings.

"Very like an invalid," said Mortimer, proudly. "But, Maggy, dear, how oddly you are dressed! That white muslin gown—plain little white bonnet, and no ornaments. What is this new fancy for dressing like a school-girl—eh?"

"My dress is very handsome," returned Marguerite; "it is the new-worked muslin

you gave such a price for last week; and my bonnet has only just arrived from Paris. You know it is my French fancy sir, to dress simply, and with only real flowers for ornaments, at a summer fête."

"Well, you always look well, child, however you dress. At least, here are fine flowers for you;" and he presented her with a bouquet, composed entirely of early moss rose-buds and Cape jessamine.

"How lovely!" said Marguerite; "how exactly my taste! It looks more like a French bouquet than one of Campbell's making."

"I don't know that it is his," replied Mortimer. "I found it, just now, on the table, where some of the servants placed it, I suppose."

"I ordered two—one for each of us," said Marguerite. "What is Campbell thinking about?" She rang the bell, and her page answered it, with two gorgeous bouquets of hot-house flowers, on a salver.

"Then, who brought this one?" she enquired, colouring, without knowing why.

"That was left by a servant on horseback, madam, an hour ago. There was no message."

"From some of your numerous admirers, I suppose?" said Mortimer, when the page left the room.

"One who knows Marguerite's taste well, at all events," added Georgy. "Cape jessamine and moss-roses are your favourite flowers, dear, are they not?"

"It looks mighty well with your white dress, Maggy, whoever sent it. I suppose you'll neglect *my* rare flowers now?"

"Which do you like me to take, sir? I don't care," hesitated Marguerite.

["Little hypocrite!" thought Georgy.]

"Which do I like?—whichever you like the best, to be sure! Perhaps, the simple flowers suit your style best."

["Old idiot!" thought Georgy. "Earnscliffe sent it, and it means something if she wears it."]

So Marguerite took the roses and Cape jessamine for herself, and placed the bouquet Georgy did not choose in a vase on the table.

Then she turned to her husband. "Do you feel really better now?" she whispered. "I scarcely like leaving you so many hours, if you are really unwell."

"I am much better, thank you," returned Mr. Mortimer, who hated to be thought ill. "It was nothing—I shall go into town for an hour, and return home as well as ever for my dinner. That reminds me, Maggy—what did you do with those papers I gave you yesterday morning, when I left in such a hurry. I hope you have them safe!"

"I locked them up with my letters," replied Marguerite. "Do you want them? I will run up-stairs and bring them for you in a moment."

She went up to the library, unlocked the secret drawer, where, for safety, she had placed Mortimer's papers, took them out, and then—flurried by the incident of the bouquet, and thinking nothing of what she was about—came down again leaving the drawer open. That drawer contained her diary and all Philip's letters.

"Here they are," she said to her husband, "quite safe, although I had the charge of them."

"Thank you, my dear. And, if you will give me permission, I shall go and sit in your own sanctum myself for an hour. It is the coolest room in the house of an afternoon."

Little knowing what the seemingly trivial request involved, Marguerite smilingly assented; and in a few minutes she and Georgy were on the road.

As they approached Richmond, they passed, and were passed in return, by numbers of gay carriages and young men on horseback, all on their way to the fête.

"We are not late," said Georgy, "at all events. Judging from the numbers of people we see, there can be scarcely any one there yet."

"Oh!" returned Marguerite, "I knew we should be in good time. I have been to so many of these dejeûners dansants, and I know that people never go early. How could such numbers of hours be passed, if one came at the appointed time?"

"What hosts of people you know, Marguerite! Every one we have seen yet has bowed."

"I know 'everybody,' as the English phrase is. I am literally tired of bowing already."

"Who is that girl who passed us last?—she is pretty."

"Miss Carlton Vere. She is considered the beauty of the season. That was Digby Grant,

the dandy par excellence, who was riding by their carriage."

"Yes, I know him by sight; he has four thousand a year,"—like all petites maitresses Georgy would always tell you how much a year everybody had; "and his uncle is Dean of Coventry, and his cousin is member for B ———. I should like to be introduced to him, dear."

"I can introduce you to any one you wish, Georgy; so, mind, if you do not meet many friends of your own, you must tell me whom you wish to know."

"Oh, thank you! the Comte De Montravers will be there however, and in *his* society I naturally care for no other."

"Georgy, I begin to think you are engaged to the Comte de Montravers?"

"One need not be engaged to everybody in whose society one finds pleasure," said Miss De Burgh, tartly, "as you, ma belle, must be very well aware."

Marguerite coloured, but made no reply—she seldom did to Miss Georgy's speeches—indeed, she forgot what they were talking about, a moment afterwards. She was looking nervously at every group of young

men they passed, wondering, hoping, fearing whether Philip were among them. But she saw nothing of him; and they soon arrived at Mrs. Lorrimer's pretty villa, where the crowds of carriages and people, sounds of music, and distant marquees in the grounds, announced the gay scene that was going on.

The entrance-hall was completely wreathed with flowers; and through this they were ushered to a room on the ground floor, opening upon the lawn, where Mrs. Lorrimer received her guests, before they dispersed into the grounds.

Marguerite presented Georgy with her usual quiet grace; and Miss De Burgh was quite flattered at the well-bred smile of Mrs. Lorrimer, which she mistook for the commencement of an acquaintance, although, in truth, the lady never thought of her again from that moment to this.

"I advise you to take refuge in the gardens, Mrs. Mortimer; you will find the lower lawn by the river delightfully cool, while the sun remains so high."

And a crowd of young men surrounded Marguerite, all anxious to dance attendance

on the celebrated beauty, who, in addition to her lovely face and irresistible charm of manner, possessed the strongest attraction of all—that of being the fashion—and the fashion too, with so notorious and fastidious a man as Earnscliffe!

"Mr. Hollingsworth, let me introduce you to my cousin, Miss De Burgh," said Marguerite, addressing a boyish-looking youth with an incipient moustache, who coloured to the eyes, and at once became the victim of Georgy's charms, without hope of release for the next hour or two.

"Isn't it delightful?" she cried, as they followed Marguerite and her train upon the lawn. "I love these free, wild things in the open air so much better than balls—don't you?"

"I haven't been to many—Cambridge is so slow."

"Cambridge! dear me! Have you not left college?" (Mr. Hollingsworth looked about fifteen.)

"No; this is only my first term."

"And do you care for dancing?"

"I have only danced at school," would have

been the truthful reply; but Mr. Hollingsworth merely said—"Not very much;" and Georgy returned—

"Nor she either. Really pleasant conversation was far better than waltzing. *Did* Mr. Hollingsworth know where that darling little shady walk led to? Could it be to the river?"

And Georgy and her new friend soon disappeared, rather, it must be confessed, to Marguerite's relief, who, though perfectly above the vulgar feeling of being ashamed of anyone, was not anxious to have Georgy's close attendance the whole day.

It was a brilliant scene. Crowds of well-dressed women—their gay toilettes gleaming like butterflies on the green turf—parterres of bright flowers, music, white marquees, and far beneath the gliding river, all united in forming a pleasant picture. And around Marguerite was assembled, as usual, a crowd of men, each anxious to be distinguished by her attention.

She walked about, and felt that every eye bent upon her as she moved. Among all the brilliant women there, hers was the most *recherchée* toilette—hers the loveliest face. Even Miss

Carlton Vere, in her flounced pink silk, and extravagantly-small lace bonnet, looked English and ungraceful beside Marguerite. Never, in her first season, had she created a greater sensation than to-day; and, of course, she was aware of it. But to herself the whole scene was without interest—all the admiration she awakened was worthless. Earnscliffe was not there, and in his absence everything beside was blank.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"DEAR Mrs. Mortimer," said a kind voice close behind her, "it is so long since I have seen you!"

Marguerite turned, and recognised Lady Millicent Gore, one of her earliest friends. They shook hands, and Lady Millicent made room for her on the seat beside herself.

"You young people will have so much dancing this evening, you must reserve your strength; and not stand or walk while the day continues so hot."

"I never dance now," replied Marguerite, "but I am delighted to have found a place by you."

"Never dance?" repeated her friend. "Is

it possible that you have renounced dancing at your age? You used to be so famous for your waltzing."

"I don't think I really cared for it; but I found it dull at balls to sit out and watch others dancing, without doing so myself. I have given it up now—I am not very strong.

"You look well; but perhaps you are flushed at this moment. You must make your husband take you abroad this summer, to get over all the fatigues of your London season."

"Oh, that is already settled! We are going to Brittany in a few weeks, to visit my old home there."

"I remember you told me all about your place in Brittany, the first evening I ever saw you, at my sister's house. Speaking of that evening, reminds me of your cousin, the marquis de St. Leon; what has become of him lately?"

"Gaston has returned to France; he forms one of the new government, already."

"The new government? I thought he was an ultra-Legitamist."

"So he used to be," said Marguerite,

smiling, "but—" she turned white, then flushed crimson. In the distance her eyes had caught one glimpse of Philip. "What did I say?" she added, vaguely.

"Poor thing!" thought Lady Millicent. "Is it possible her cousin interested her so much? with such a husband, however, it is not wonderful." And delicately changing the subject, she began speaking of some of the people who were walking up and down on the lawn before them. "Miss Carlton Vere is very pretty," she remarked, after a few dear friends had been discussed. "But it is not a style I at all admire—do you?"

"Oh! every one must think her lovely," replied Marguerite, in rather an absent tone.

"Yes, but her consciousness of her own beauty, greatly diminishes its charm. She wants your unaffectedness, Mrs. Mortimer. Look at her now, as she walks with Mr. Earnscliffe, and shakes back her long fair curls while she looks up at him. Do you suppose it is a case of serious attention?"

Lady Millicent went so seldom into the world, that she was unaware even if Marguerite and Earnscliffe were acquainted; and con-

tinued making the most unconscious remarks upon his apparent devotion to Miss Carlton Vere. "He is really distinguished-looking," she said. "Not only is his face handsome, but his manner, and whole air are so simple—so unlike most young men that one sees. Do you not agree with me?"

"Mr. Earnscliffe is good-looking," answered Marguerite.

"Good looking! my dear, what very qualified praise. Of course you have read his writings. Are you not warmer in your admiration of them, than of their author? Oh! you are acquainted with him then," as Earnscliffe passed, and took off his hat to Marguerite, "now tell me what his conversation is like?"

And Marguerite had to talk of Philip for a good half-hour to Lady Millicent Gore (who felt an especial interest in authors), and all this time to watch Philip in earnest, and apparently devoted conversation with Miss Carlton Vere; while that young creature smiled and blushed, and shook back her curls more playfully eaeh time as she passed the spot where Marguerite was seated.

"The sun is pouring full upon us," she

cried at last—too weary and impatient to listen even to the gentle Lady Millicent. "Will you not change your position?"

"Thank you, my dear. I like this place; and I don't feel the sun in the least. But I will keep you no longer: you have already devoted nearly an hour to an old woman—which, for the *belle* of a fête like this, is indeed sufficient."

So Marguerite rose, and, taking the arm of Digby Grant—who had been hovering patiently near her for some time—walked with him towards the river. He was an agreeable man, in spite of his affectation, and only too anxious that Mrs. Mortimer should consider him so; but she was strangely absent to-day, and replied *à travers* to his prettiest speeches. She was thinking solely of Philip; of his visible avoidance of her; his marked attention to another—wondering whether, indeed, he had taken her at her word, and their separation had already begun. Occupied with such reflections, no wonder that Digby Grant's words fell upon an unlistening ear, while he led her, unconscious how far she was going, to a remote part of the lawn, where as yet no other beside themselves had penetrated.

"Would you not like to escape this terrific sun, Mrs. Mortimer?—that rustic boat-house looks inviting."

"As you please—yes, certainly!" And Marguerite entered, really glad to be away from the crowd, and only wishing her companion would leave her.

"Pray don't let me take you away from everybody, Mr. Grant! I am so tired, I shall remain here for half-an-hour; but do return to the lawn without me. You may come back for me as late as you please."

"I am not only too thankful to be away," he replied; "these odious mixed things are my horror—people of all kinds—you don't know who in the least! The last time I was at Mrs. Lorrimer's, she had some dreadful Syrian wretches, whom I remembered as shoe-blacks in their own country. To day, there are still worse atrocities. Actually I saw that man, calling himself the Count de Montravers—a low person, who would be received in no decent society in France; but whom English people will invite to their houses, and listen to while he descants on the regeneration of England. I had only one object in coming here, Mrs. Mortimer!"

"Could you shelter me from the sun? Thank you. It fell full upon my face."

"Let me hold your parasol! No? Your bouquet then—your hands are full," and he took Marguerite's—Philip's—bouquet, and inhaled its fragrance with great gusto.

Digby Grant was tall and handsome; and they formed a pleasant tableau at that moment. Marguerite in her white dress and with the mellow light shining full upon her upturned face, and her companion, leaning down (as he poured out the little silvery nothings she did not hear) and fanning the warm air upon Marguerite's cheek with her moss roses and jessamines.

"Pray do not shake them to pieces," she said at last. "See, one rose bud has fallen out already."

"Which I may keep for my guerdon," he replied, picking it up, and preparing to place it in his coat.

"No—no," interrupted Marguerite, eagerly, "give me the flower if you please, and I can replace it. I never give away my flowers."

"Are they so valued for their own sakes, or for that of the donor?" in rather a piqued tone at her refusal.

"For their own sakes," replied Marguerite, colouring, "flowers are my passion—I—"

Just then she caught the sound of a well-known step, advancing on the gravel path beside them; and in another moment, Earnscliffe's tall figure was visible. He was alone, and after glancing at her and her companion, walked slowly on with a very slight salutation, and his face calm and grave as usual.

"He must believe that I am happy without him," thought Marguerite. "That I am encouraging the idle attentions of another already!" And this idea, that to many women would have been one of entire satisfaction, gave her such intolerable pain, that she rose hastily, and proposed returning towards the house at once.

Digby Grant, like every idler in May Fair, had heard rumours of Earnscliffe's attentions to Mrs. Mortimer; but in her rapidly changing colour, and Philip's calm demeanour, when he suddenly interrupted their tête-à-tête he only read, with the prompt vanity of a shallow nature, that his own attentions were producing their effect upon Marguerite, and that Earnscliffe was jealous of him.

Under this impression, and not heeding her absent, wearied manner, he remained so assiduously attentive during the next hour, that every one said, 'Mrs. Mortimer was commencing another flirtation.' 'Faute de mieux,' her female friends added, 'Earnscliffe had already deserted her for Miss Calton Vere.'

Meantime, Georgy had lost Mr. Hollingsworth, who, after a series of manœuvres, contrived to slip away from her among the crowd; and, for about half-an-hour, failing to spy out Marguerite, she had wandered along, as is the habitude of obscure persons at large assemblies, unnoticed by any body, except those few who languidly raised their eye-glasses and classed her among Mrs. Lorrimer's 'oddities.' At length, she met her friend, the comte de Montravers, and seized upon him with an avidity that should have been most flattering to the foreigner. Like Miss De Burgh, however, he was on the look out for great people himself, and he was not particularly anxious to be the attendant of an unknown young person of two-and-thirty, nor nearly so *empressé* in his manner as when they took morning walks together in the mystic regions

of Brunswick Square; and he passed on, after a very short conversation. So Georgy was again discomforted; and when, at length, she joined Marguerite, was not in the best of tempers.

"Where in the world have you been?" she exclaimed. "Since I saw you disappear in the distance, two hours ago, with Digby Grant, I have never met you. It appears *he* is your adorer, after all, not Philip Earnscliffe, who, I can assure you, has been most devoted to that lovely Miss Carlton Vere, the whole afternoon. I have met them a dozen times together. But how pale and out of spirits you seem! Can't you introduce me to some one, as you promised you would? Mr. Grant for instance."

"He is talking to Mrs. Lorrimer at this moment. Tell me the names of any other people you wish to know."

And Marguerite — weary and spiritless though she was—tried to exert herself for Miss De Burgh; and, ever ready to please another, walked about with her, and introduced her to everybody she wished, even to Digby Grant, who raised one eyebrow and bent his

head just sufficiently to move his topmost curl, at the introduction. But Georgy was radiant with smiles, and soon appended herself to some of her new acquaintance with such determined pertinacity, that Marguerite felt she was fairly disposed of for the remainder of the evening, and also that she would have to wait many a long hour before Miss De Burgh would choose to leave.

To herself it seemed that the lagging time would never wear on. Tired, depressed, miserable at Earnscliffe's seeming desertion, while yet she had to force smiles and attend to the conversation of the people around, nothing but Georgy's presence could have prevented her from returning home at once, on the plea of illness (an excuse that her varying colour and strangely excited expression made only too plausible), rather than support any longer that weariest of all suffering—an aching heart at a great party.

The dancing was now at its height; and the two larger marquees on the lawn, brilliantly lighted, were thronged with dancers and lookers-on; while many were better pleased to wander still about the grounds, where hun-

dreds of coloured lamps glimmered in the dark summer night. Marguerite was standing somewhat apart from the entrance to the principal tent, and for the moment unattended; her head turned away from the light and music, towards the silent river beneath, when, close beside her, she heard Philip's voice.

"Mrs. Mortimer—Marguerite, may I dare to offer you my arm?"

She started, and her heart beat so violently she could not answer. Then she placed her hand, almost without knowing that she did so, upon his arm.

"Can you spare five minutes from all this gay scene—from all your admirers, while you say good-bye to an old friend?"

"Philip!" (The altered tone of her voice shocked him.) "I am very weary; I hate all this crowd and glare; and I should have left already, but—"

He led her down a narrow side-walk—the same Georgy and Mr. Hollingsworth had previously discovered—and, in a few minutes, they were as completely alone as though they were at Kersaint. Only the sounds of the distant music was there to remind them of

the scene they had left. The warm, soft air—the odour from the garden flowers—the uncertain light of the stars—the presence of each other—was all they were awake to. In those few minutes, the world, and all belonging to it, were forgotten. Marguerite's hand was upon his arm; she heard his voice again—more dear even from those few days of separation—and her life, that had just before seemed so void, was again a glowing, delicious heaven.

[Oh Love! even when guilty, what glimpses of Paradise yet open upon us in such times as these. When the pressure of a hand, a half-uttered word can blot out the remembrance of long weary years of life in a second, and bring us back to the fair untarnished dreams of our youth. Oh Love! that such a feeling ever *can* be guilt.]

"You are pale now, Marguerite! and yet so flushed a few hours ago—are you not well?"

"Did you really notice me before this? I thought you were too much occupied to think of my appearance."

"You could not really believe it. I might

as well affect jealousy of the butterflies that have been hovering about you—of Digby Grant, because I saw you with him alone, when he was holding my flowers for you. Marguerite! our feelings are too deep for these small fears."

"Your flowers? they were indeed from you then!" and the hand that held them unconsciously pressed them closer.

"Did you not feel that they were from me? believing they were from a stranger would you have worn them? Oh! do not let us attempt any longer to dissemble. Marguerite, the hour has come when *that* has past for ever. I received your note telling me to be here, and I am here. My conduct to-day, has only been assumed to mislead the idle world, who already may have spoken of the attachment which I have vainly tried to hide ——"

"— But I told you to hope nothing—that I retracted nothing. I came here, that this might be our last meeting. Oh, Philip! you do not know the agony that I have passed through since I saw you, how I have striven and prayed—as much for your sake as my own—to overcome this love that can only end in misery."

"And in vain, Marguerite! tell me so—whatever happens, let me once more hear from those dear lips, that you love me—once more—"

They had now reached the river, whose liquid masses floated by in their black stillness beneath them, and Marguerite shuddered as the chilly air from the water struck upon her heated cheek. She shrank to Philip's side; and his blood became fire as he felt her slight form clinging, as it were, to him for protection. He thought of the world's cold breath, already raised to wither Marguerite's good fame; and—strange sophistry!—felt that his honour constituted him her protector.

"Philip—you could not urge me thus, if it were wrong. You are so much better and wiser than I—Philip! will it really make you happier, if I once more tell you the secret of my existence—the secret that will make my whole life blank for evermore? Then hear me—I love you still as I did at Kersaint!"

Her voice sank to the lowest whisper; but Earnscliffe heard it still. He seized both her cold hands suddenly within his own—

"Marguerite!"—(his voice, too, was low, and altered in its sound from what she had ever known it before)—"let this moment, then, decide our destiny. You say that you love me still—that that love will make your whole life blank without me—be mine, then! I know the sacrifice I ask of you—the sacrifice of good name, of position, of all that women hold dear, and that against this, my passionate love—my utter devotion—are all that I have to offer. Come with me to another country, where, in our love, all the disappointments of the past shall be forgotten, and we will live for each other alone;" and his arm was thrown round her trembling form.

But Marguerite, even yet, shrank back. "Let me go!" she whispered, very faintly—"let me return to my home—to my husband—I will not bring dishonour upon him!"

"As you will, madam!" He released his hold instantly. "I was wrong in supposing that for *my* love you could so readily give up your fair fame. You speak of his honour, and forget that I, too, should forfeit every ambition, every prospect in life, and deem their loss as nothing if I possessed you. Oh, Mar-

guerite!"—his voice sinking again into its deepest, most passionate tenderness—"forgive me! I know not what I say. I cannot lose you! Oh, Marguerite, Marguerite! remember all the years that we have loved each other—that you were mine, in heart at least, before your husband ever knew you—that years ago you promised me never to love another."

"Philip, I have kept my word."

"Then redeem it now—now, when all my happiness in this life depends upon your decision."

"Philip—Ah, may God help me!—I *can* have no will but yours." . . . . . .

He folded her to his breast: he knew that she was his. But, even at that moment, he could hear the unnatural throbbing of her heart, and mark that the face upturned to his was one of agony!

The hell of a fallen angel had already begun. With the first breath of guilt, a dark shadow had fallen across Marguerite's love.

"Mine, mine!" whispered Earnscliffe, tenderly. "Death only shall part us now."

"Death!" she repeated, with a shudder; "yes, you are right to speak of death—"

"—When years of radiant life are spread before us? In Italy—in the sweet south—my Marguerite, we shall, at length, be happy together—happy, as we should have been long ago, if fate had not divided us."

"Aye, fate!" she answered, dreamily. "There was an evil fate in my mother's destiny and in mine. Both married where they could not love; she died young, as I shall."

"My own love, do not speak of dying. In my new-born joy, do not cause me the torture of thinking that I could ever lose you."

"Philip, I am yours—wrong, lost, though I may be, I am yours. I shall never part from you now. My love is interwoven with my very life, and can only end with it. But it will not be for very long. Something tells me, even at this moment, that I shall die. When the summer comes again, and you are breathing another warm night such as this, you will be alone: but you will still think fondly of me—still hold my remembrance dearer than all other, and in that thought is almost happiness sufficient."

She looked up at him with one of those

ineffably sweet smiles that I never saw on any countenance but her's, and laid her head upon his arm. The gesture was so natural, so innocent, so like Marguerite, so unlike guilt, that Earnscliffe's conscience recoiled even yet from her betrayal. "My life's devotion must atone to her for all she loses," was his inward resolution while he bent over the pale, upturned face.

As though any human devotion could make atonement for sin to a nature like her's!

* * * *

"How frightfully ill Mrs. Mortimer looks!" said one of a group of friends, when, leaning on Philip's arm, she re-entered the ball-room; "and so wild and haggard! See how her eyes wander round, as though she saw nothing, and how she clings to him! Things are approaching a crisis."

"Oh, I have foreseen it long; indeed, I have not taken my Sophia Jane at all latterly, when I called at the Mortimer's. From the first moment I saw her and Earnscliffe together, I knew how it would end: there was something so bold looking about her to me."

"Mrs. Mortimer bold-looking!" chimed in

Digby Grant, who, though a rival, was more generous than female friends. "She looks more like dying than anything else at this moment; but who could ever call such a face as hers bold?"

"Oh, of course, Mr. Grant! men always admire that style of person. *I* cannot appreciate the excessive innocence of a married woman who carries on these kinds of desperate flirtations. If I were Mrs. Lorrimer, I should dislike having the dénouement at my house—for a dénouement there is, I am certain."

"She is fainting, by George!" exclaimed Digby.

"Look at Mr. Earnscliffe's face! What a disgusting exhibition!" broke in two or three plain young women; and soon a score of different stories were in circulation—'Earnscliffe had said something to Mrs. Mortimer, which made her faint dead away on the spot!' 'Jealousy of his attentions to Miss Carlton Vere.' 'Fainted as Earnscliffe was running away with her in her own carriage,' and so on.

But Marguerite knew and heard nothing. She was in a deep swoon; and when, at

length, she partially recovered, she found herself in the open air, with only her kind friend, Lady Millicent, beside her.

"Where am I?—is he here?" were her first incoherent words.

"You have fainted, my dear Mrs. Mortimer—you are ill," said the gentle voice, which Marguerite at once recognized. "As soon as you have recovered, you had better return home at once."

"Home!" said Marguerite, wildly. "No, no, not home—anywhere but there. I cannot return home!"

Lady Millicent's face became very grave.

"Can all this possibly arise from any recollection of her cousin?" she thought. "Everyone is mentioning Mr. Earnscliffe's name; but this morning they seemed barely acquainted."

"Dear me! what is all this scene, Marguerite?" cried a loud, woman's voice. "Have you really fainted?"

"Georgy, let us go. I am very ill."

"Go? at nine o'clock? Thank you, my dear! I have made a great many agreeable acquaintances; and I have not the least idea of going."

Lady Millicent looked round with perfect horror at Miss De Burgh.

"Are your movements controlled by that —lady?" she whispered to Marguerite.

"I brought her with me. I believe I must wait until she is ready. But I am indeed weary and ill, Georgy," she added, looking imploringly towards her.

"Can I take care of your friend?" interposed Lady Millicent, overcoming her repugnance to the friend's appearance, in her kind feeling to Marguerite.

"Oh, Lady Millicent! you are too kind."

'Lady Millicent' sounded sweetly to Georgy's ears; and she became much more affectionate immediately that she discovered the little, plainly-dressed old lady was an earl's daughter.

"Dear Marguerite, if you are, indeed, ill, of course we will go at once. I thought it was merely a passing weakness."

"My chaperonage, and escort home, are entirely at your friend's service," again remarked Lady Millicent. "Only let me see you safely into your carriage at once. You are not in a state to remain one moment in

yonder crowded rooms." And a servant was sent at once to order Mrs. Mortimer's carriage; while Georgy, with many smiles, tried to ingratiate herself with her new acquaintance.

'Dear Marguerite was not very strong, did faint sometimes; the cool drive home would refresh her. It was *so* kind of Lady Millicent to offer to chaperone herself!' and so on:— during all of which Marguerite still clung weakly to her friend's arm, whose disgust at Miss Georgy's selfishness increased with every word she uttered.

Earnscliffe was hovering near, though afraid to direct attention by approaching closer; but when the carriage was announced, he advanced and offered Marguerite his arm.

"Good-night, my dear Mrs. Mortimer. I shall come and see you to-morrow morning."

"Good-night, Lady Millicent!" lingering wistfully as they shook hands. "You have been very kind to me. Good-night." Marguerite felt that they were parting for the last time, and her voice was thick and husky. "Good-night, Georgy!"

And then, threading their way through the

crowds who pressed round them, to stare upon her altered face, Earnscliffe led Marguerite to her carriage.

"Farewell, my own love!" he whispered, as she took her place. "We shall meet to-morrow; and part no more—only a few short hours."

"Oh, Philip! a strange fear is upon me. I tremble at being alone," she replied.

He bent forward, as though to present her bouquet, which he still held, and pressed his lips upon her hand. It was icy cold—too cold even for his kiss to warm it, and he felt that she was trembling violently.

"Drive home as fast as possible," he said to the coachman. "Mrs. Mortimer has been taken ill." And in another minute he watched the carriage disappear which bore her from him.

Then Philip returned to the ball-room. Where he paid so much attention to Miss Carlton Vere, that people began to think, after all, they had been mistaken in their suspicions; and Miss Georgy reflected with pleasure how she would tell Marguerite 'that Mr Earnscliffe seemed to enjoy himself a vast deal better after her departure.'

CHAPTER XIX.

ALONE, through the silent night, Marguerite drove home. The lights, the confused sounds of music, were still flashing through her heated brain; but, clear above them all, rang Philip's last words—"To-morrow, and we shall part no more;" while ever—like a death-knell to that tumultuously happy thought — her own heart echoed—"To-morrow, and no more peace; to-morrow, and I shall no longer dare to speak of my childhood or my father . . . My father!"—and the remembrance of his pure, passionless face—of his perfect integrity, his unwavering principle—awed her into a sense of her own guilt, deeper than what any thought of Mortimer could have awakened.

As she proceeded, every object by the way-side took the form of something connected with Kersaint. The waving branches of the Park-trees, overhanging the road, seemed, to her excited imagination, the ancient Breton forests; the groups of labourers, returning late from hay-making, bore semblance to the peasants she had not seen for years. She passed a cottage garden, and some white lilies, shining calmly in the moonlight, brought back the altar in the old cathedral, freshly-decked for early mass. And all rose up together in judgment against her.

"But it is for *him!*" she exclaimed, in her terror at the Invisible Presence she felt around—as though the mention of his name could overpower That—"to be with Philip, who is dearer than life itself! Whatever the sin—whatever the misery, he wishes it; and I have no other will."

Then she leant back in the carriage, and closed her eyes; she could not bear the light of the stars to-night—even they seemed watching her reproachfully. And, in addition to this tension of mental pain, there was a fiery sensation in her brain, a quick, uneven throbbing

at her heart, different to what she had ever experienced before, and which heightened into actual agony as she approached home.

To meet Mortimer again—once more to lay her head beside the old man's trusting heart, and know that on the morrow she would leave him, in loneliness and dishonour—was something so utterly abhorrent, so foreign, to Marguerite's nature, that, even under the strong sway of an irresistible passion—with Philip's kiss yet warm upon her hand—she shrank loathingly from herself and the task before her.

"Better," she thought, "never to have seen him again—never more have entered the home he has given me—than thus betray him to the last!"

And once the desperate purpose half arose of bidding the coachman drive on to town—anywhere except home. But where could she go?—to Philip?—she revolted instantly from the thought. To Lady Millicent Gore?—what pretext could she form for such an extraordinary action? And thus—while she yet deliberated and wavered—an abrupt turn of the carriage told Marguerite that she had al-

ready entered her own lodge-gates—she was already home.

When she reached the front door, her limbs trembled so that she could scarcely totter from the carriage to the house; and, but for the servant, who caught her arm, she would have sank upon the threshold.

"Where—where is Mr. Mortimer?" she gasped, hardly conscious what she said.

"My master is in the library; he has been there all the afternoon," answered the man, terrified at the ghastly paleness of his young mistress. "Lord, madam! has anything happened?"

"Give me a light," said Marguerite, in a calm, composed tone. "In the library!" she murmured to herself, and the fact of having left the drawer open which contained her letters and journal, flashed upon her mind with sudden clearness. "Then he knows all!" she thought. "Thank God that, at least, I am spared the guilt of further concealment!"

She took the light with a steady hand, and walked so firmly upstairs, that the servant stared after her in astonishment, and thought her pallor and wild looks on entering must,

after all, have arisen from some accidental faintness. She went straight along to the library, never stopping for a moment on her way, then opened the door, still without faltering, and in perfect silence.

Mortimer was seated at the table by a lighted lamp; and before him, as Marguerite's forebodings told her, lay her open diary, her papers, Philip's letters, dried flowers that he had given her years before at Kersaint—all the hoarded records of her love.

For a moment neither spoke: then Marguerite walked close up before him, her large dark eyes unnaturally dilated, her hands clasped tightly together upon her bosom.

"Madam! *you* here?" she did not attempt to speak. "You have returned then to my house—to your *home*," with bitter emphasis on that word. "Has your lover failed in his appointment, though you were true? or is it convenient that I should be honoured with your presence for one night more."

Still she never answered, only her lips parted a little; but there was no sound.

"Speak!" he thundered, rising from his seat. "I command you to speak—the time

is over for any more of your cursed innocence."

"I do not pretend to be innocent," she replied, very low.

"No. With such evidence as this," pointing to the table, "even your hypocrisy is confounded, although it is the blackest that ever a woman's blasted beauty covered since the world began. Some women go to perdition after years of marriage—that is bad enough! but you have never been pure—you were corrupt in your childhood."

"Sir!" raising her clasped hands towards him, "do not speak to me so. Kill me, but do not say that I was guilty when you married me."

"Oh! Kill you, madam! You may spare me those theatrical expressions. Keep them against the time your poet-lover deserts you, they may tell upon him! Not guilty, you say, when I married you? then what do all these letters mean—these entries in your own handwriting?"

"A girlish love, sir—not guilt."

"Girlish love for a married man?—girlish love still, I suppose? only that he is free, you

married. But you forget, by—! aye, and your paramour too, that there is another in the case now—that you have a husband implicated in your dishonour, and one that is no fool to look on, and smile at his own shame, as some in your fashionable world do! Oh! the fool I have been already," he went on passionately, "to think that at your age, and with your face, you were going into the world innocently. Fool to believe all your own accounts that you amused me with, as a cover to your intrigues. By heaven! I believe that this is not the only one; and that your cousin Gaston came in for his share of your girlish love."

"No, no, sir," she cried, vehemently; "guilty though I am, do not accuse me of such infamy as that! You do not—you cannot—believe that I am so utterly lost?" looking steadily at him.

He moved his position uneasily, and turned away his head, as though afraid to look down into that truthful face that had already deceived him—

"Well, I believe you!" he answered, after a minute. "One is sufficient. And such love

as you have borne your first lover, was not likely to be shared, I own. How proud I have been of you, Marguerite!" he went on more softly—"how I have boasted that *my* wife was above even the shadow of reproach!—how I have studied every wish, every thought of yours—"

A sudden sob choked his words; and, even more touched at this gentleness than at his angry words of reproach, Marguerite sank upon her knees.

"Oh, forgive me!" she cried. "I acknowledge my sin—my utter unworthiness—my ingratitude; but say that you forgive me! Do not let your last words to me be curses!"

"My last words!" he echoed, scornfully, all the momentary weakness over. "My last—before you rejoin Philip Earnscliffe, I conclude. No, madam! they shall not be curses. I have forbearance enough for that, and you will be sufficiently cursed in your own after-life. Rise up—pray! and leave me. I am in no humour for scenes now. I will not disgrace you before the servants by telling you to quit the roof you have dishonoured at once—but never let me see your face again!"

She rose—she turned—and, without a word, tried to move towards the door. But strange lurid lights flashed before her eyes, an intolerable pain was about her heart, and her limbs refused to help her.

"I—am—ill," she said faintly, leaning heavily against the wall.

But Mortimer's heart was steeled. He believed her far guiltier than she was, and thought it all acting.

"Leave me madam!" he repeated, fiercely. "Do you hear me?—leave my presence!" Still she never moved; only her head sank down, her hands clasped more convulsively for support. "Then, as you refuse to do so, I will go myself—I will remain no longer in the same room with the woman I have called my wife, until I knew that she was ——"

The cruel word had no sooner escaped him in his passion than he wished it recalled. To his last hour Mortimer will never forget the wild scream that burst from Marguerite's lips —the expression of her face as she turned it full round to his! Both will haunt him, as I am told the mute anguish of a stricken deer has—years afterwards—haunted the memory of him who smote her.

"Not to me!" she cried, staggering forward a few weak steps—"Say it was not to me!—not to your little Marguerite ——"

She threw her arms forward, as though once again to clasp him, then sank—like a thing of stone—at his feet. Mortimer believed that she had fainted, and raised her instantly; but, as he did so, a crimson torrent broke from her mouth, dabbling her neck, her dress, her flowers, with the dark tide of death. In that moment of fearful excitement the vague dread of her whole life was realized. She had ruptured a blood-vessel.

Still, she strove to look up at her husband, and her lips moved inarticulately, as though asking him to recall his last words.

"Forgive me!" she said, at length, with an almost superhuman effort, while the blood literally poured from her mouth as she spoke. "I was not *so* guilty; and tell Philip—Philip ——"

But a film gathered over the upturned eyes: a sudden spasm contracted the features: and so—while she yet uttered his name—she expired.

CHAPTER XX.

When Philip returned home to his hotel from Mrs. Lorrimer's fête, he did not attempt to rest; but remained up the whole night, writing letters to his uncle, to Neville, and a few other friends, telling them of his sudden departure from England. He made all his business arrangements—wrote to his banker for letters of credit—to some of his political supporters, saying, that for the present he had abandoned his intention of standing for L ——; and all this with a strange calmness, at which he was himself astonished. Although he knew that Marguerite's promise once given, she would never fail him, he could not realize the truth that she was to be actually his—

actually leave England with him. From the very first it had been so completely a part of their love to look upon it as hopeless, and for him to consider Marguerite as the type of all purity and innocence, that, even amidst the very preparation for their flight, his mind refused to see the evidence of their union and her guilt.

"Breakfast, sir?" exclaimed the astonished waiter, when he entered and saw Earnscliffe still in his evening dress in the sitting-room, and with the candles alight in the broad daylight, although burnt down and flickering in their sockets.

"Leave the room!" exclaimed Earnscliffe, angrily, "I will not be interrupted in this way. No, bring me breakfast," he added, as the man was closing the door—"bring it at once—I have a sudden recall to the Continent."

And he gathered all his letters hastily together, and locked them in a writing-case.

The waiter looked rather mystified, although too much accustomed to all eccentricities of temper to be surprised—and he concluded the great author had been composing all night, and did not know what he was talking about.

Philip had not tasted food since the preceding morning; but he could only swallow a cup of coffee, and afterwards pace up and down the room, waiting impatiently for eleven o'clock. At that hour he purposed going down to Wimbledon, finally to arrange with Marguerite for meeting her in town, towards evening, in time to reach Dover for the night mail. But an unusual tremour was upon him His strong nerves started at the slightest sound. Every footstep in the passage he fancied was approaching him with some message, some ill tidings, from Marguerite; and, at length, unable to support this kind of uneasy suspense any longer, he hastily changed his dress, and ordered his horse; resolving to linger on the road, and so get rid of the lagging hour-and-a-half which yet remained.

When he reached Wimbledon, it was only half-past ten. "No matter," he thought; "she will be alone by this time, and the interview is better over, for both of us. My poor Marguerite! I know well the feverish uncertainty she must suffer. It will be soon finished now."

He left his horse at the hotel, and walked

on towards Mortimer's house: the gates stood open, and he entered without speaking to any one. The gardener's children were not playing, as usual, in the lodge-garden; no servants were about; there seemed an unusual gloom upon the whole place, or it appeared so to Philip's excited fancy; and he walked on hurriedly to the house, and knocked. Marguerite's little page came to the door, with pale, horror-struck face, and eyes swollen with crying.

"Is Mrs. Mortimer at home?"

"Oh, sir!—my mistress—have you not heard?"

"Heard what?" exclaimed Philip, seizing the child's arm so suddenly that it deprived him of all his remaining fortitude, and, instead of replying, he burst into tears. Just then a stealthy step approached from the other side of the hall, and the butler's solemn face appeared.

"Mr. Earnscliffe—sir," not speaking above his breath, "my master has given orders that you should be admitted."

"And Mrs. Mortimer?" asked Philip, eagerly.

The man shook his head. "If you will follow me, sir," he replied, "my master will tell you himself."

Philip felt that something of importance had taken place; either an explanation had occurred between the husband and wife, or Marguerite had already quitted her home; no glimmering of the truth, however, crossed his mind. He was ushered into the dining-room, and waited alone for about ten minutes in all the misery of suspense, and while each moment seemed to him an hour. At length, the door opened, and Mortimer entered. For a second, Earnscliffe did not recognize him. In one night his appearance had altered from strong middle life into decrepid old age; his face haggard and pale, his step uncertain, his gait drooping.

Earnscliffe advanced to salute him.

"Sir—do you offer me your hand?"

The hollow tone made Philip actually start back; he felt that Mortimer knew everything.

"I—I should not have come—"

"Had you known all! No—probably not. There is no more attraction for you now, Mr. Earnscliffe! You have finished your work well."

"Great God! sir, tell me—how is Marguerite? Is she here?"

"Aye, she is in my house still. You will be content to leave her with me, now, I suspect."

"I can bear this no longer!" cried Philip, vehemently. "If you will not tell me how Marguerite is, I will find her—see her myself." And he approached the door.

"Will you so?" Mortimer answered, coming up to his side. "Then let me take you to her chamber. I am not a jealous husband, you perceive, Mr. Earnscliffe! although I am aware of your attachment, I conduct you to your love myself!" And he motioned to Philip to follow him.

"The old man is mad," thought Earnscliffe. "He has discovered all, and is doting in his jealous rage."

But he shuddered with a vague foreboding of ill, as he followed Mortimer's tottering steps up the stair-case. The house was oppressively still. Although a bright summer morning, every window was shut and darkened. They passed Marguerite's sitting-room, and, through the half-opened door, Philip noted that the

flowers were all removed from the stands, her favorite bird was not in its accustomed place, the piano was closed, no signs of occupation lay on the table. When they came to the door of the library Mortimer trembled visibly, and attempted to pass on quicker; and Marguerite's little spaniel, who was silently following them, smelt for a moment at the threshold, and then shrank fearfully away. Philip saw all this with that quick perception to external things which the mind frequently experiences under the most violent emotion; and when at last they reached Marguerite's sleeping-room, and Mortimer noiselessly turned the handle of the door, he recoiled, and the cold dews stood thick upon his forehead.

"Tell me, in pity tell me," he whispered, "is Marguerite—is she—*there?*"

"Oh, go in!" returned Mortimer. "So gay a gallant as Philip Earnscliffe surely fears nothing. Go in, sir! I have brought you to your love!"

And, with a powerful effort, Earnscliffe forced himself to enter the room that already his tortured sense told him was one of death.

Upon the bed, dressed in white, lay Marguerite, her face uncovered. A sweet, loving expression was yet upon her features; her hands lay in an attitude of natural repose upon her breast, and all that told of death were one or two dark gouts of blood upon her night-dress, and a faint streak across the parted lips.

With a burst of agony, before which Mortimer's own sorrow quailed, Earnscliffe flung himself by her side, covered her cold hands with kisses, called upon her to awake to him by all the names that the fervour of his nature could pour forth.

"Oh, it is well for you to recall her, who have been the cause of her death!" said Mortimer, in a low, concentrated voice.

But Philip never heard him: unconscious, even of his presence, he continued sobbing with such passionate excess as is rarely witnessed in a young, strong man. "Marguerite return to me; remember *how* I have loved you! Marguerite, my child, my own!"

At length, jealous even now of the kisses Philip pressed upon her cold, insensible hands,

Mortimer came round and touched his shoulder.

"Leave, sir!" he whispered. "You have seen all that I intended you should. Your place is not here now."

Philip sprang to his feet, and turned upon him a face of anguish before which Mortimer shrank back.

"This is not my place!" he repeated, between his set teeth. "Not mine!—who have loved her with my very life—before you ever knew her—not mine!—who have been the cause of all her sorrows. Leave me with her, sir!" he went on, almost fiercely; "my place *is* here — I can injure you no more now. No—" as Mortimer was beginning to reply—"in her presence let there be no unseemly words—afterwards I will hear all you have to say; but now I must be with her—and alone."

And—strange sovereignty of a mighty passion—Mortimer felt constrained to respect a deeper grief than his own, and, after a moment's irresolution, left the room in silence.

He went down to the dining-room; and, seating himself in his arm-chair, wept feebly like a child; and, for an hour longer, Philip kept his watch with the dead.

During that hour, what tongue can tell the dread remorse—the resolves—the meditated atonements of Earnscliffe's heart? They rest between him and Heaven, and his future life alone can test their sincerity. At length, pale, but tearless now, he rose, and bent down over her—scanning, for the last time, her waxen features, as though to imprint each line upon his memory for ever—then, he stooped, and kissed her lips. That long, lingering kiss which poor humanity gives to the clay which once held its idol before yielding it up for evermore!

* * * * *

The dining-room door stood open, and Mortimer met him as he passed.

"Not now!" said Philip, waving him back; "I will speak to you at any other time—not now."

"One word, Mr. Earnscliffe—I think I have a right to demand it—I have one question to ask!" And, struck by the softened tone, the wistful expression of the old man's face, Philip mastered his own emotion, and entered the room.

Mortimer closed the door, and turned round to Earnscliffe; — a strange look of dawning

remorse and doubt contracting his features, as though with some sharp bodily pain.

"You are right," he began, huskily, "that this is no time for you—and me—to speak together. But, answer me one thing. By the dead body of her you have quitted—by your own honour—was she—pure still?"

"She was as spotless as the very light of heaven!" returned Earnscliffe, solemnly. "Whatever were my own guilty hopes for the future, I swear to you that Marguerite was pure!—"

"Then, I was her murderer!" Mortimer interrupted, hoarsely. "Leave me, sir. You are the less guilty of the two."

CHAPTER XXI.

MARGUERITE'S sudden death, and the circumstances attending it, furnished conversation until the close of the season. Actually for four consecutive weeks one subject continued to be spoken of in the great world with unflagging interest!

But this certainly presented no common attraction. The sudden disappearance of one before whose beauty and talent all others had paled, was, for her own sex, an occurrence of the gravest importance; and received a heightened zest from the numberless stories—some utterly false, some containing very slight colouring of truth—which connected Earnscliffe with the catastrophe, and tarnished the pure name against which, until a few weeks before, no evil breath was ever raised.

The exact circumstances of the last night of Marguerite's life were never actually known.

All Mortimer could be brought to say was, that his wife returned home flushed and over-excited from Mrs. Lorrimer's fête; that she complained at once of illness; and, while they were still speaking together, was seized with the sudden attack from which she never rallied.

"It was in Mrs. Mortimer's family," he explained to the doctors. "Her mother had died from a complaint of the heart; her father almost precisely in the same manner as herself." But his trembling, eager manner, as he spoke, would have told the world-wise physician, even had his own science not already done so, that some concealed and overwhelming emotion must have been the immediate cause of Marguerite's sudden death.

Meanwhile, the confidential talk of servants —that electric telegraph, whose secret wires communicate, with lightning speed, what the recognized channels of information would be weeks in diffusing—gained far more ground than the asseverations of the husband. Mr. Grimes had heard his master's voice speaking in loud, angry tones before the bell rang, which summoned him to the fearful scene of death in the library. Mademoiselle Eulalie had been bold enough to take a glance at a

few of the papers upon the table, which, in those first moments of terror, Mortimer had taken no heed of. Mademoiselle Eulalie saw that they were in the same handwriting as the ones her mistress had so constantly received—saw that they were signed, 'Philip Earnscliffe.'

And all this, and much more of a like nature, was related to the countless servants who came 'to enquire' for Mortimer. And soon in every club and *coterie* it was told, 'that Earnscliffe had long been Mrs. Mortimer's lover—years ago, even before she was married; but that the husband, as usual, was blinded longer than anyone else; that, at length, his tardy suspicions were raised; that at the Richmond fête Mrs. Mortimer had besought Earnscliffe to take her with him from England; that he had refused; she had returned home half distracted: Mortimer, in the meantime, had broken open her desk, and found all Earnscliffe's letters. Fearful explanations had ensued, ending' (in this, at least, they could weave no falsehood) 'with Mrs. Mortimer's rupturing a blood-vessel of the heart, and her death.'

Even Georgy found herself quite of importance, from knowing so many details of the story,

and flaunted from house to house in the French bonnet and dress Marguerite had given her—the relationship was too distant to require mourning—eager to tell all she knew, and say:—"How very melancholy it was! but she must confess she always thought that poor Mrs. Mortimer was completely French in her notions of morality, and much too fond of admiration for a married woman!"

And thus, while those who had so long courted and fluttered round Marguerite, were casting each an additional stone at her blackened memory, she—the best and purest among them all—was carried to her grave—a new grave in some new cemetery; and laid there with only two old men for mourners—Danby and her husband.

Only two mourners at her funeral! But, when the summer twilight was deepening, a stranger bribed the keeper of the gates that evening to open them for him to enter. And throughout the first dark night that Marguerite was in her grave, this stranger kept watch beside her—kneeling upon the new-laid turf in such tearless, rigid anguish as can smite the heart but once in a lifetime—then leaves it blank and dead for ever.

* * * *

When Neville called upon Earnscliffe the following day he started at seeing his face. Every remaining look of youth was gone; around his eyes was a deep hollow shade; and already many a silver line streaked his dark hair.

"You have suffered, Earnscliffe! You are fearfully changed!"

"I have," replied Philip, without looking up or extending his hand to him. "I have gone through all the bitterness of remorse that any man *could* do—and yet live."

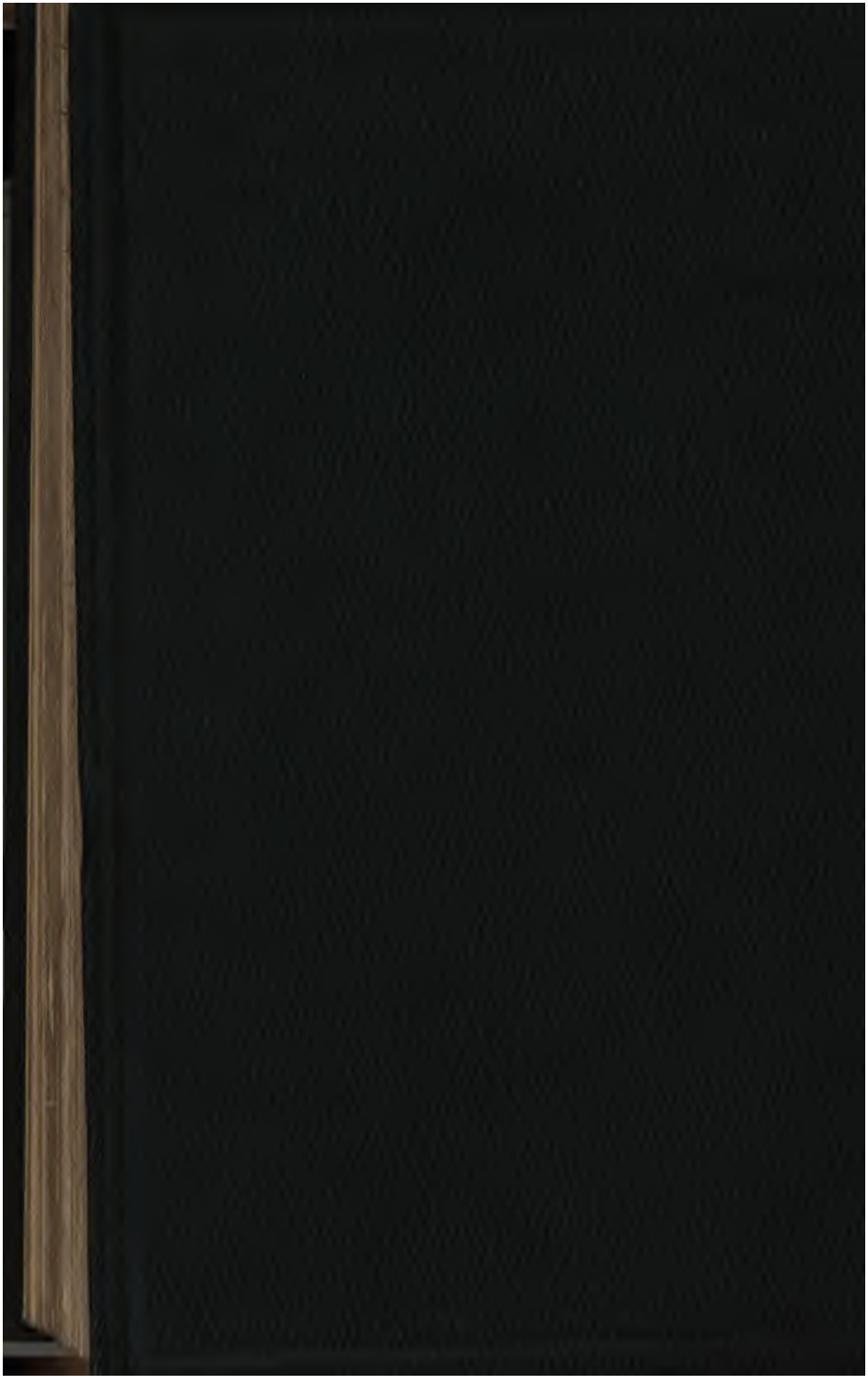
Time has passed on, and Earnscliffe has again interests in life; deeper, graver interests than any of those which engrossed him in his youth. All desire for personal distinction is gone; and if, in his fresh political career he has won success, it was unsought for. He has firm convictions now upon the points where he once so wavered—a stronger sense than formerly of his own responsibility: and, in strenuously supporting the cause of social reform, in devoting himself wholly to the welfare of others, his high powers of mind have found, at length, a genuine and lasting scope for action.

Neville is, as of old, his greatest, his only friend (for political partizanship, however warm, can never constitute friendship to a nature like Philip's) and he always looks forward with relief to the close of each session, and the lonely autumn which he and the painter shall spend together in Scotland. For Neville is still the same untiring student as ever; and, celebrated though he has become, works from Nature with all the fresh zest that he had at eighteen.

But Philip has never written since Marguerite's death. Either he feels no more inspiration, or the constant excitement and turmoil of political life leave him no spare time for literature. He rarely goes into the world—never into the society where he once so shone, and whose leaders would still receive him with open arms, did he choose to return to their small distinctions and applause.

Is Earnscliffe happy?

Oh reader! is there not some shadow across your own memory—some grave over which no flower can ever grow, to answer that question?

THE END.

CHARLES BEVAN AND SON, PRINTERS, CHAPEL STREET, GROSVENOR SQ.